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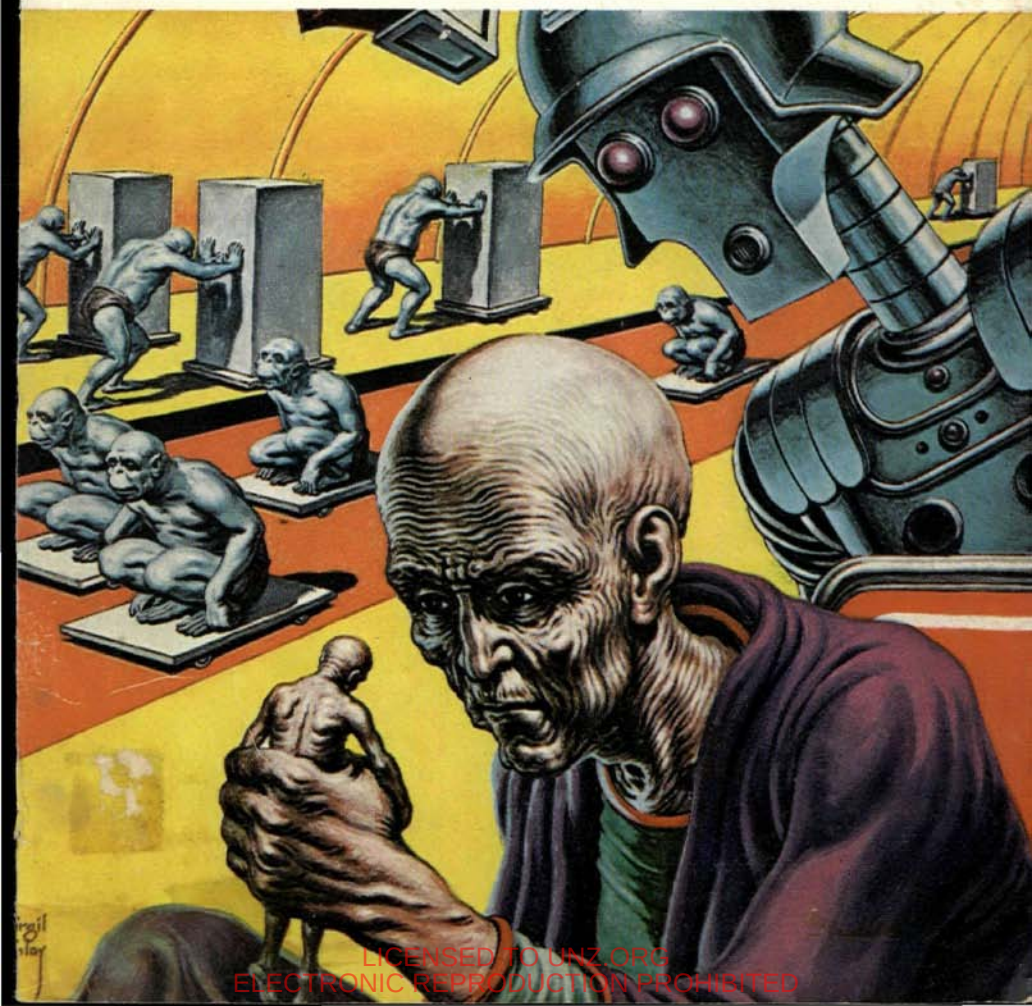
SCIENCE FICTION

UNDER OLD EARTH
by
CORDWAINER SMITH

WHERE THE CHANGED ONES GO by ROBERT SILVERBERG

And concluding

THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT by FREDERIK POHL



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ALL STORIES NEW

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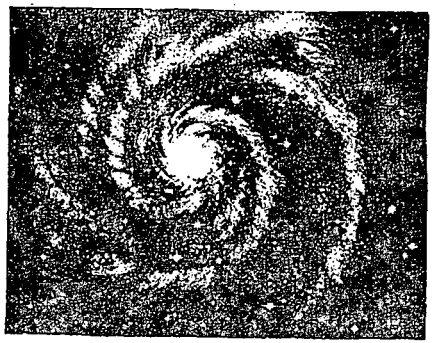

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THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE

The New York Academy of Sciences, which will be having its sesquicentennial anniversary next year, hopes to celebrate it in an unusual, but we think appropriate way. Its plan is to add another skyscraper to New York City's skyline, a 30-story World Science Center in the Lincoln Center complex which will, as the name suggests, provide office space, meeting facilities and other necessary services for what is rapidly becoming the world's number one industry: Science.

To us this seems like a very good thing indeed. Time was when big office buildings were put up by a very few classes of enterprises. In the small towns of America the buildings that stood out across the circling farms were the telephone company's, or the local power company's, and just about nothing else. The towers that dominated the cities were ordinarily put up by banks or insurance companies — principally as a way of investing their funds. More recently it became common for big business to construct big buildings to house their headquarters — publications like *Time-Life* or major newspapers, retail chains, industrial concerns and so on.

But the World Science Center is something else. The only near comparison we can thing of is Technology Tower, an adjunct of M.I.T. that dominates Cambridge, Massachusetts; yet a large proportion of Tech Tower is given over to commercial enterprises, while the World Science Center, even bigger, is going to be simon-pure. It will be for science and nothing else.

It seems to us that we have to go back earlier than the building boom of this century to find an analogy to the World Science Center, all the way back to the great cathedral builders of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. This too is a "sermon in stone"; it is an embodiment of a change in ways of life, a new kind of orientation for human thought.

We wish the New York Academy of Sciences well with their project *and* their 150th anniversary — and we await with excitement and anticipation what they may plan for their 200th!

— THE EDITOR

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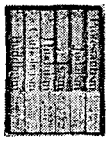

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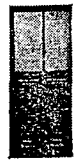

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UNDER OLD EARTH

by CORDWAINER SMITH

Illustrated by FINLAY

Down into Old Earth the Lord hastened
—to do one great last deed, and die!

I need a temporary dog
For a temporary job
On a temporary place
Like Earth!
— Song from The Merchant of Menace

I

There were the Douglas-Ouyang planets, which circled their sun in a single cluster, riding around and around the same orbit unlike any other planets known. There were the gentlemen-suicides back on Earth, who gambled their lives —even more horribly, gambled sometimes for things worse than their lives — against different kinds of geophysics which real

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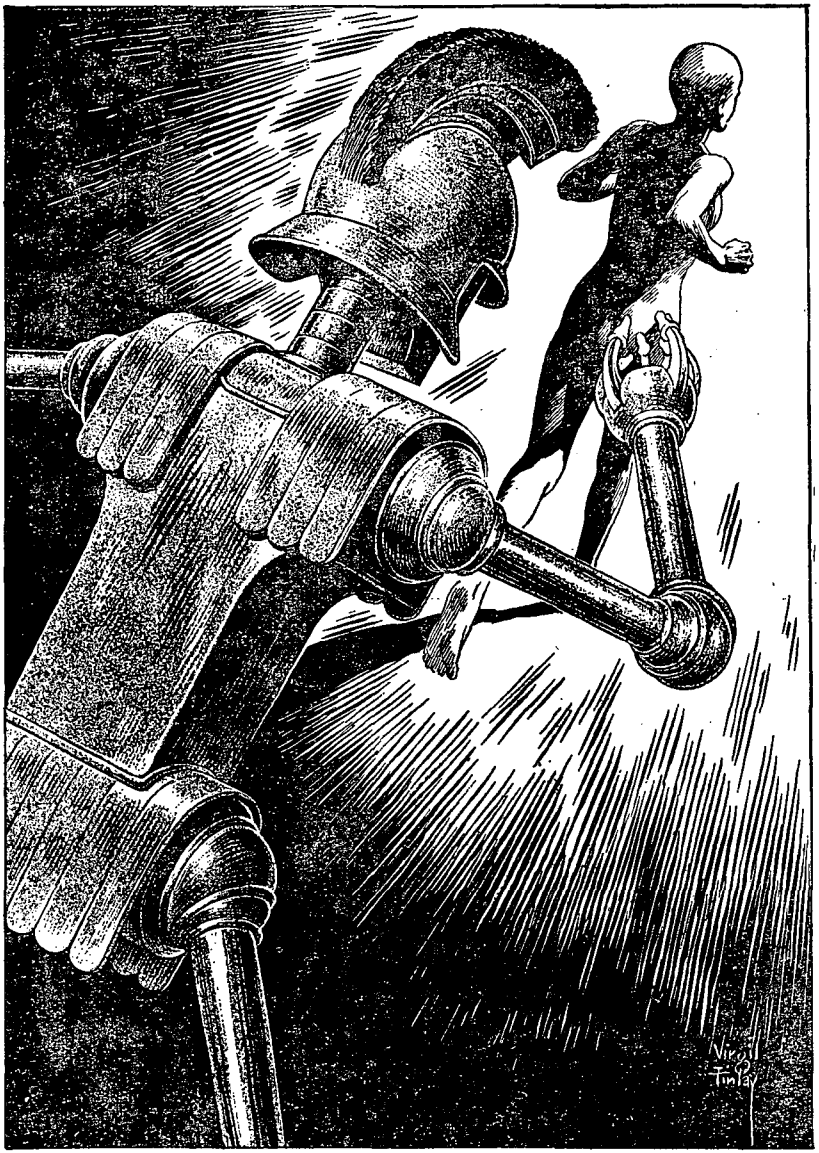

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men had never experienced. There were girls who fell in love with such men, however stark and dreadful their personal fates might be. There was the Instrumentality, with its unceasing labor to keep man man. And there were the citizens who walked in the boulevards before the Rediscovery of Man. The citizens were happy. They had to be happy. If they were found sad, they were calmed and drugged and changed until they were happy again.

This story concerns three of them: the gambler who took the name Sun-boy, who dared to go down to the Gebiet, who confronted himself before he died; the girl Santuna, who was fulfilled in a thousand ways before she died; and the Lord Sto Odin, a most ancient of days, who knew it all and never dreamed of preventing any of it.

Music runs through this story. The soft sweet music of the Earth Government and the Instrumentality, bland as honey and sickening in the end. The wild illegal pulsations of the Gebiet, where most men were forbidden to enter. Worst of all, the crazy fugues and improper melodies of the Bezirk, closed to men for fifty-seven centuries — opened by accident, found, trespassed in! And with it our story begins.

II

The Lady Ru had said, a few centuries before: "Scraps of knowledge have been found. In the ultimate beginning of man, even before there were aircraft, the wise man Laodz declared, 'Water does nothing but it penetrates everything. Inaction finds the road.' Later an ancient lord said this: "There is a music which underlies all things. We dance to the tunes all our lives, though our living ears never hear the music which guides us and moves us. Happiness can kill people as softly as shadows seen in dreams.' We must be people first and happy later, lest we live and die in vain."

The Lord Sto Odin was more direct. He declared the truth to a few private friends: "Our population is dropping on most worlds, including the earth. People have children, but they don't want them very much. I myself have been a three-father to twelve children, a two-father to four, and a one-father, I suppose, to many others. I have had zeal for work and I have mistaken it for zeal in living. They are not the same.

"Most people want happiness. Good: we have given them happiness.

"Dreary useless centuries of

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happiness, in which all the unhappy were corrected or adjusted or killed. Unbearable desolate happiness without the sting of grief, the wine of rage, the hot fumes of fear. How many of us have ever tasted the acid, icy taste of old resentment? That's what people really lived for in the Ancient Days, when they pretended to be happy and were actually alive with grief, rage, fury, hate, malice and hope! Those people bred like mad. They populated the stars while they dreamed of killing each other, secretly or openly. Their plays concerned murder or betrayal or illegal love. Now we have no murder. We cannot imagine any kind of love which is illegal. Can you imagine the Murkins with their highway net? Who can fly anywhere today without seeing that net of enormous highways? Those roads are ruined, but they're still here. You can see the abominable things quite clearly from the moon. Don't think about the roads. Think of the millions of vehicles that ran on those roads, the people filled with greed and rage and hate, rushing past each other with their engines on fire. They say that fifty thousand a year were killed on the roads alone. We would call that a war. What people they must have been, to rush day and night and to build things which would help other people to rush even more! They were different from us. They must have been wild, dirty, free. Lusting for life, perhaps, in a way that we do not. We can easily go a thousand times faster than they ever went, but who, nowadays, bothers to go? Why go? It's the same there as here, except for a few fighters or technicians." He smiled at his friends and added, ". . . . and Lords of the Instrumentality, like ourselves. We go for the reasons of the Instrumentality. Not ordinary people reasons. Ordinary people don't have much reason to do anything. They work at the jobs which we think up for them, to keep them happy while the robots and the underpeople do the real work. They walk. They make love. But they are never unhappy.

"They can't be!"

The Lady Mmona disagreed, "Life can't be as bad as you say. We don't just think they are happy. We *know* they are happy. We look right into their brains with telepathy. We monitor their emotional patterns with robots and scanners. It's not as though we didn't have samples. People are always turning unhappy. We're correcting them all the time. And now and then there are bad accidents, which

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even we cannot correct. When people are very unhappy, they scream and weep. Sometimes they even stop talking and just die, despite everything we can do for them. You can't say that isn't real!"

"But I do," said the Lord Sto Odin.

"You do what?" cried Mmona.

"I do say this happiness is not real," he insisted.

"How can you," she shouted at him, "in the face of the evidence? *Our* evidence, which we of the Instrumentality decided on a long time ago. We collect it ourselves. Can we, the Instrumentality, be wrong?"

"Yes," said the Lord Sto Odin.

This time it was the entire circle who went silent.

Sto Odin pleaded with them. "Look at *my* evidence. People don't care whether they are one-fathers or one-mothers or not. They don't know which children are theirs, anyhow. Nobody dares to commit suicide. We keep them too happy. But do we spend any time keeping the talking animals, the underpeople, as happy as men? And do underpeople commit suicide?"

"Certainly," said Mmona. "They are preconditioned to commit suicide if they are hurt too badly for easy repair or if they fail in their appointed work."

"I don't mean that. Do they ever commit suicide for *their* reasons, not ours?"

"No," said the Lord Nuru-or, a wise young Lord of the Instrumentality. "They are too desperately busy doing their jobs and staying alive."

"How long does an underperson live?" said Sto Odin, with deceptive mildness.

"Who knows?" said Nuru-or. "Half a year, a hundred years, maybe several hundred years."

"What happens if he does not work?" said the Lord Sto Odin, with a friendly-crafty smile.

"We kill him," said Mmona, "or our robot-police do."

"And does the animal know it?"

"Know he will be killed if he does not work?" said Mmona. "Of course. We tell all of them the same thing. Work or die. What's that got to do with people?"

The Lord Nuru-or had fallen silent and a wise, sad smile had begun to show on his face. He had begun to suspect the shrewd, dreadful conclusion toward which the Lord Sto Odin was driving.

But Mmona did not see it and she pressed the point. "My lord," said she, "you are insisting that people are happy. You admit they do not like to be unhappy. You seem to want to

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bring up a problem which has no solution. Why complain of happiness? Isn't it the best which the Instrumentality can do for mankind? That's our mission. Are you saying that we are failing in it?"

"Yes. We are failing." The Lord Sto Odin looked blindly at the room as though alone.

He was the oldest and wisest, so they waited for him to talk. He breathed lightly and smiled at them again. "You know when I am going to die?"

"Of course," said Mmona, thinking for half a second. "Seventy-seven days from now. But you posted the time yourself. And it is not our custom, my Lord, as you well know, to bring intimate things into meetings of the Instrumentality."

"Sorry," said Sto Odin, "but I'm not violating a law. I'm making a point. We are sworn to uphold the dignity of man. Yet we are killing mankind with a bland hopeless happiness which has prohibited news, which has suppressed religion, which has made all history an official secret. I say that the evidence is that we are failing and that mankind, whom we've sworn to cherish, is failing too. Failing in vitality, strength, numbers, energy. I have a little while to live. I am going to try to find out."

The Lord Nuru-or asked with sorrowful wisdom, as though he guessed the answer: "And where will you go to find out?"

"I shall go," said the Lord Sto Odin, "down into the Gebiet."

"The Gebiet — oh, no!" cried several. And one voice added, "You're immune."

"I shall waive immunity and I shall go," said the Lord Sto Odin. "Who can do anything to a man who is already almost a thousand years old and who has chosen only seventy-seven more days to live?"

"But you can't!" said Mmona. "Some criminal might capture you and duplicate you, and then we would all of us be in peril."

"When did you last hear of a criminal among mankind?" said Sto Odin.

"There are plenty of them, here and there in the offworlds."

"But on Old Earth itself?" asked Sto Odin.

She stammered. "I don't know. There must have been a criminal once." She looked around the room. "Don't any of the rest of you know?"

There was silence.

The Lord Sto Odin stared at them all. In his eyes was the brightness and fierceness which had made whole generations of Lords plead with him to live

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just a few more years, so that he could help them with their work. He had agreed, but within the last quarter-year he had overridden them all and had picked his day of death. He had lost none of his powers in doing this. They shrank from his stare while they waited with respect for his decision.

The Lord Sto Odin looked at the Lord Nuru-or and said, "I think you have guessed what I am going to do in the Gebiet and why I have to go there."

"The Gebiet is a preserve where no rules apply and no punishments are inflicted. Ordinary people can do what *they* want down there, not what we think they should want. From all I hear, it is pretty nasty and pointless, the things that they find out. But you, perhaps, may sense the inwardness of these things. You may find a cure for the weary happiness of mankind."

"That is right," said Sto Odin. "And that is why I am going, after I make the appropriate official preparations."

III

Go he did. He used one of the most peculiar conveyances ever seen on Earth, since his own legs were too weak to carry him far. With only two-ninths of a year to live, he did not want to waste time getting his legs re-grafted.

He rode in an open sedan-chair carried by two Roman legionaries.

The legionaries were actually robots, without a trace of blood or living tissue in them. They were the most compact and difficult kind to create, since their brains had to be located in their chests — several million sheets of incredibly fine laminations, imprinted with the whole life experience of an important, useful and long-dead person. They were clothed as legionaries, down to cuirasses, swords, kilts, greaves, sandals and shields, merely because it was the whim of the Lord Sto Odin to go behind the rim of history for his companions. Their bodies, all-metal, were very strong. They could batter walls, jump chasms, crush any man or underperson with their mere fingers, or throw their swords with the accuracy of guided projectiles.

The forward legionary, Flavius, had been Head of Fourteen-B in the Instrumentality — an espionage division so secret that even among Lords, few knew exactly of its location or its function. He was (or had been, till he was imprinted on a robot-mind as he lay dying) the director of historical research for

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the whole human race. Now he was a dull, pleasant machine carrying two poles until his master chose to bring his powerful mind into bright, furious alert by speaking the simple Latin phrase, understood by no other person living, *Summa nulla est.*

The rear legionary, Livius, had been a psychiatrist who turned into a general. He had won many battles until he chose to die, somewhat before his time, because he perceived that battle itself was a struggle for the defeat of himself.

Together, and added to the immense brainpower of the Lord Sto Odin himself, they represented an unsurpassable team.

"The Gebiet," commanded the Lord Sto Odin.

"The Gebiet," said both of them heavily, picking up the chair with its supporting poles.

"And then the Bezirk," he added.

"The Bezirk," they chimed in toneless voices.

Sto Odin felt his chair tilt back as Livius put his two ends of the poles carefully on the ground, came up beside Sto Odin and saluted with open palm.

"May I awaken?" said Livius in an even, mechanical voice.

"Summa nulla est," said the Lord Sto Odin.

Livius' face sprang into full animation. "You must not go there, my Lord! You would have to waive immunity and meet all dangers. There is nothing there yet. Not yet. Some day they will come pouring out of that underground Hades and give you men a real fight. Now, no. They are just miserable beings, cooking away in their weird unhappiness, making love in manners which you never thought of —"

"Never mind what you think I've thought. What's your objection in real terms?"

"It's pointless, my lord! You have only bits of a year to live. Do something noble and great for man before you die. They may turn us off. We would like to share your work before you go away."

"Is that all?" said Sto Odin.

"My Lord," said Flavius, "you have awakened me too. I say, go forward. History is being respun down there. Things are loose which you great ones of the Instrumentality have never even suspected. Go now and look, before you die. You may do nothing, but I disagree with my companion. It is as dangerous as space-three might be, if we ever were to find it, but it is *interesting*. And in this world, where all things have been done, where all thoughts have been

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thought, it is hard to find things which still prompt the human mind with raw curiosity. I'm dead, as you perfectly well know, but even I, inside this machine brain, feel the tug of adventure, the pull of danger, the magnetism of the unknown. For one thing, they are committing crimes down there. And you Lords are over-looking them."

"We chose to overlook them. We are not stupid. We wanted to see what might happen," said the Lord Sto Odin, "and we have to give those people time before we find out just how far they might go if they are cut off from controls."

"They are having babies!" said Flavius excitedly.

"I know that."

"They have hooked in two illegal instant-message machines," shouted Falvius.

Sto Odin was calm. "So that's why the Earth's credit structure has appeared to be leaking in its balance of trade."

"They have a piece of the congohelium!" shouted Flavius.

"The congohelium!" shouted the Lord Sto Odin. "Impossible! It's unstable. They could kill themselves. They could hurt Earth! What are they doing with it?"

"Making music," said Flavius, more quietly.

"Making *what*?"

"Music. Songs. Nice noise to dance to."

The Lord Sto Odin sputtered, "Take me there right now. This is ridiculous. Having a piece of the congohelium down there is as bad as wiping out inhabited planets to play checkers."

"My Lord," said Livius.

"Yes?" said Sto Odin.

"I withdraw my objections," said Livius.

Sto Odin said, very drily, "Thank you."

"They have something else down there. When I did not want you to go, I did not mention it. It might have aroused your curiosity. They have a god."

The Lord Sto Odin said, "If this is going to be a historical lecture, save it for another time. Go back to sleep and carry me down."

Livius did not move. "I mean what I said."

"A god? What do you call a god?"

"A person or an idea capable of starting wholly new cultural patterns in motion."

The Lord Sto Odin leaned forward, "You *know* this?"

"We both do," said Flavius and Livius.

"We saw him," said Livius. "You told us, a tenth-year ago, to walk around freely for thirty hours, so we put on ordinary

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robot bodies and happened to get into the Gebiet. When we sensed the congohelium operating, we had to go on down to find out what it was doing. Usually, it is employed to keep the stars in their place — "

"Don't tell me that. I know it. Was it a man?"

"A man," said Flavius, "who is re-living the life of Akhnaton."

"Who's that?" said the Lord Sto Odin, who knew history, but wanted to see how much his robots knew.

"A king, tall, long-faced, thick lipped, who ruled the human world of Egypt long-long before atomic power. Akhnaton invented the best of the early gods. This man is reenacting Akhnaton's life step by step. He has already made a religion out of the sun. He mocks at happiness. People listen to him. They joke about the Instrumentality."

Livius added, "We saw the girl who loves him. She herself was young, but beautiful. And I think she has powers which will make the Instrumentality promote her or destroy her some day in the future."

"They both made music," said Flavius, "with that piece of the congohelium. And this man or god — this new kind of Akhnaton, whatever you may want to call him, my Lord — he was dancing a strange kind of dance. It was like a corpse being tied with rope and dancing like a marionette. The effect on the people around him was as good as the best hypnotism you ever saw. I'm a robot now, but it bothered even me."

"Did the dance have a name?" said Sto Odin.

"I don't know the name," said Flavius, "but I memorized the song, since I have total recall. Do you wish to hear it?"

"Certainly," said the Lord Sto Odin.

Flavius stood on one leg, improbable angles and began to sing in a high, insulting tenor voice which was both fascinating and repugnant:

Jump, dear people, and I'll howl for you.
Jump and howl and I'll weep for you.
I weep because I'm a weeping man.
I'm a weeping man because I weep.
I weep because the day is done,
Sun is gone,
Home is lost,
Time killed dad.
I killed time.
World is round.
Day is run,
Clouds are shot,
Stars are out,
Mountain's fire,
Rain is hot,
Hot is blue.
I am done.
So are you.
Jump, dear people, for the howling man.
Leap, dear people, for the weeping man.
I'm a weeping man because I weep for you!

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"Enough," said the Lord Sto Odin.

Flavius saluted. His face went back to amiable stolidity. Just before he took the front ends of the shaft he glanced back and brought forth one last comment:

"The verse is skeltonic."

"Tell me nothing more of your history. Take me there."

The robots obeyed. Soon the chair was jogging comfortably down the ramps of the ancient left-over city which sprawled beneath Earthport, that miraculous tower which seemed to touch the stratocumulus clouds in the blue clear nothingness above mankind. Sto Odin went to sleep in his strange vehicle and did not notice that the human passers-by often stared at him.

The Lord Sto Odin woke fitfully in strange places as the legionaries carried him further and further into the depths below the city, where sweet pressures and warm, sick smells made the air itself feel dirty to his nose.

"Stop!" whispered the Lord Sto Odin, and the robots stopped.

"Who am I?" he said to them.

"You have announced your will to die, my Lord," said Flavius, "seventy-seven days from now, but so far your name is still the Lord Sto Odin."

"I am alive?" the Lord asked.

"Yes," said both the robots.

"You are dead?"

"We are not dead. We are machines, printed with the minds of men who once lived. Do you wish to turn back, my lord?"

"No. No. Now I remember. You are the robots. Livius, the psychiatrist and general. Flavius, the secret historian. You have the minds of men, and are not men?"

"That is right, my Lord," said Flavius.

"Then how can *I* be alive—I, Sto Odin?"

"You should feel it yourself, sir," said Livius, "though the mind of the old is sometimes very strange."

"How can I be alive?" asked Sto Odin, staring around the city. "How can I be alive when the people who knew me are dead? They have whipped through the corridors like wraiths of smoke, like traces of cloud; they were here, and they loved me, and they knew me, and now they are dead. Take my wife, Eileen. She was a pretty thing, a brown-eyed child who came out of her learning chamber all perfect and all young. Time touched her and she danced to the cadence of time. Her body grew full, grew old. We repaired it. But at last she cramped in

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death and she went to that place to which I am going. If you are dead, you ought to be able to tell me what death is like, where the bodies and minds and voices and music of men and women whip past these enormous corridors, these hardy pavements, and are then gone. How can passing ghosts like me and my kind, each with just a few dozen or a few hundred years to go before the great blind winds of time whip us away— how can phantoms like me have built this solid city, these wonderful engines, these brilliant lights which never go dim? How did we do it, when we pass so swiftly, each of us, all of us? Do you know?"

The robots did not answer. Pity had not been programmed into their systems. The Lord Sto Odin harangued them, none the less:

"You are taking me to a wild place, a free place, an evil place, perhaps. They are dying there too, as all men die, as I shall die, so soon, so brightly and simply. I should have died a long time ago. I was the people who knew me, I was the brothers and comrades who trusted me, I was the women who comforted me, I was the children whom I loved so bitterly and so sweetly many ages ago. Now they are gone. Time touched them, and they were not. I can see everyone that I ever knew racing through these corridors, see them young as toddlers, see them proud and wise and full with business and maturity, see them old and contorted as time reached out for them and they passed hastily away. Why did they do it? How can I live on? When I am dead, will I know that I once lived? I know that some of my friends have cheated and lie in the icy sleep, hoping for something which they do not know. I've had life, and I know it. What is life? A bit of play, a bit of learning, some words well-chosen, some love, a trace of pain, more work, memories, and then dirt rushing up to meet sunlight. That's all we've made of it —we, who have conquered the stars! Where are my friends? Where is my *me* that I once was so sure of, when the people who knew me were time-swept like storm-driven rags toward darkness and oblivion? You tell me. You ought to know! You are machines and you were given the minds of men. You ought to know what we amount to, from the outside in."

"We were built," said Livius, "by men and we have whatever men put into us, nothing more. How can we answer talk like

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yours? It is rejected by our minds, good though our minds may be. We have no grief, no fear, no fury. We know the names of these feelings but not the feelings themselves. We hear your words but we do not know what you are talking about. Are you trying to tell us what life feels like? If so, we already know. Not much. Nothing special. Birds have life too, and so do fishes. It is you people who can talk and who can knot life into spasms and puzzles. You muss things up. Screaming never made the truth truthful, at least, not to us."

"Take me down," said Sto Odin. "Take me down to the Gebiet, where no well-mannered man has gone in many years. I am going to judge that place before I die."

They lifted the sedan-chair and resumed their gentle dog-trot down the immense ramps down toward the warm steaming secrets of the Earth itself. The human pedestrians became more scarce, but undermen — most often of gorilla or ape origin— passed them, toiling their way upward while dragging shrouded treasures which they had filched the uncatalogued storehouses of Man's most ancient past. At other times there was a wild whirr of metal wheels on stone roadway; the undermen, having offloaded their treasures at some intermediate point high above, sat on their wagons and rolled back downhill, like grotesque enlargements of the ancient human children who were once reported to have played with wagons in this way.

A command, scarcely a whisper, stopped the two legionaries again. Flavius turned. Sto Odin was indeed calling both of them. They stepped out of the shafts and came around to him, one on each side.

"I may be dying right now," he whispered, "and that would be most inconvenient at this time. Get out my manikin meee!"

"My Lord," said Flavius, "it is strictly forbidden for us robots to touch any human manikin, and if we do touch one, we are commanded to destroy ourselves immediately thereafter? Do you wish us to try, nevertheless? If so, which one of us? You have the command, my Lord."

IV

He waited so long that even the robots began to wonder if he died amid the thick wet air and the nearby stench of steam and oil.

The Lord Sto Odin finally roused himself and said:

"I need no help. Just put the

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bag with my manikin meee on my lap."

"This one?" asked Flavius, lifting a small brown suitcase and handling it with a very gingerly touch indeed.

The Lord Sto Odin gave a barely perceptible nod and whispered, "Open it carefully for me. But do not touch the manikin, if those are your orders."

Flavius twisted at the catch of the bag. It was hard to manage. Robots did not feel fear, but they were intellectually attuned to the avoidance of danger; Flavius found his mind racing with wild choices as he tried to get the bag open. Sto Odin tried to help him, but the ancient hand, palsied and weak, could not even reach the top of the case. Flavius labored on, thinking that the Gebiet and Bezirk had their dangers, but that this meddling with manikins was the riskiest thing which he had ever encountered while in robot form, though in his human life he had handled many of them, including his own. They were "Manikin, Electro-encephalographic and endocrine" in model form, and they showed in miniaturized replica the entire diagnostic position of the patient for whom they were fashioned.

Sto Odin whispered to them. "There's no helping it. Turn me up. If I die, take my body back and tell the people that I misjudged my time."

Just as he spoke, the case sprang open. Inside it there lay a little naked human man, a direct copy of Sto Odin himself.

"We have it, my Lord," cried Livius, from the other side. "Let me guide your hand to it, so that you can see what to do."

Though it was forbidden for robots to touch manikins meee, it was legal for them to touch a human person with the person's consent. Livius's strong cupro-plastic fingers, with a reserve of many tons of gripping power in their human-like design, pulled the hands of the Lord Sto Odin forward until they rested on the manikin meee. Flavius, quick, smooth, agile, held the Lord's head upright on his weary old neck, so that the ancient Lord could see what the hands were doing.

"Is any part dead?" said the old Lord to the manikin, his voice clearer for the moment.

The manikin shimmered and two spots of solid black showed along the outside upper right thigh and the right buttock.

"Organic reserve?" said the Lord to his own manikin meee, and again the machine responded to his command. The whole miniature body shimmed to a violent purple and then subsided to an even pink.

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"I still have some all-around strength left in this body, prosthetics and all," said Sto Odin to the two robots. "Set me up, I tell you! Set me up."

"Are you sure, my Lord," said Livius, "that we should do a thing like that here where the three of us are alone in a deep tunnel? In less than half an hour we could take you to a real hospital, where actual doctors could examine you."

"I said," repeated the Lord Sto Odin, "set me up. I'll watch the manikin while you do it."

"Your control is in the usual place, my Lord?" asked Livius.

"How much of a turn?" asked Flavius.

"Nape of my neck, of course. The skin over it is artificial and self-sealing. One twelfth of a turn will be enough. Do you have a knife with you?"

Flavius nodded. He took a small sharp knife from his belt, probed gently around the old Lord's neck and then brought the knife down with a quick, sure turn.

"That did it!" said Sto Odin, in a voice so hearty that both of them stepped back a little. Flavius put the knife back in his belt. Sto Odin, who had almost been comatose a moment before, now held the manikin meee in his unaided hands. "See, gentlemen!" he cried. "You may be robots, but you can still see the truth and report it."

They both looked at the manikin meee, which Sto Odin now held in front of himself, his thumb and fingertip in the armpits of the medical doll.

"Watch what it reads," he said to them with a clear, ringing voice.

"Prosthetics!" he shouted at the manikin.

The tiny body changed from its pink color to a mixture. Both legs turned the color of a deep bruised blue. The legs, the left arm, one eye, one ear and the skull-cap stayed blue, showing the prostheses in place.

"Felt pain!" shouted Sto Odin at the manikin. The little doll returned to its light pink color. All the details were there, even to genitals, toenails and eyelashes. There was no trace of the black color of pain in any part of the little body.

"Potential pain!" shouted Sto Odin. The doll shimmered. Most of it settled to the color of dark walnut wood, with some areas of intense brown showing more clearly than the rest.

"Potential breakdown — one day!" shouted Sto Odin. The little body went back to its normal color of pink. Small lightnings showed at the base of the brain, but nowhere else.

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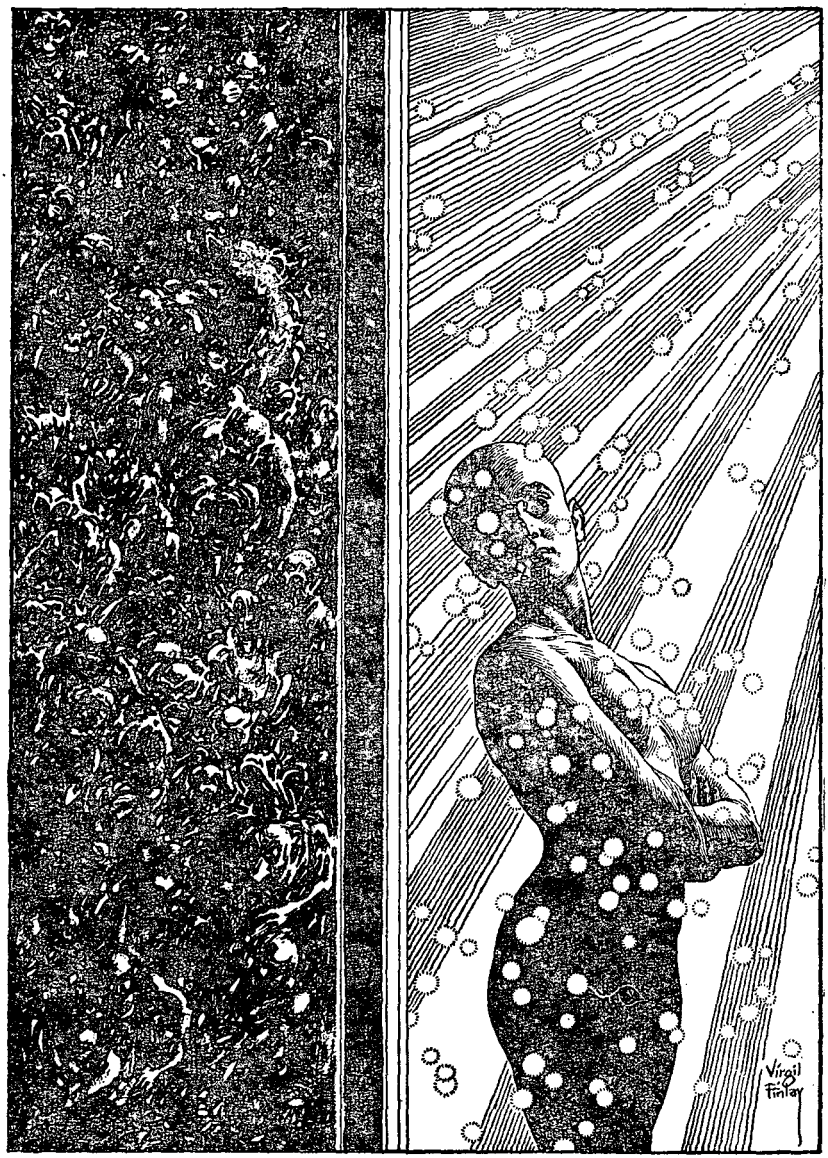

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"I'm all right," said Sto Odin. "I can continue as I have done for the last several hundred years. Leave me set up on this high life-output. I can stand it for a few hours, and if I cannot, there's little lost." He put the manikin back in its bag, hung the bag on the door-handle of the sedan-chair and commanded the legionaries, "Proceed!"

The legionaries stared at him as if they could not see him.

He followed the lines of glance and saw that they were gazing rigidly at his manikin mee. It had turned black.

"Are you dead?" asked Livius, speaking as hoarsely as a robot could.

"Not dead at all!" cried Sto Odin. "I have been death in fractions of a moment, but for the time I am still life. That was just the pain-sum of my living body which showed on the manikin meee. The fire of life still burns within me. Watch as I put the manikin away. . ." The doll flared into a swirl of pastel orange as the Lord Sto Odin pulled the cover down.

They looked away as though they had seen an evil or an explosion.

"Down, men, down," he cried, calling them wrong names as they stepped back between their carrying shafts to take him deeper under the vitals of the earth.

V

He dreamed brown dreams while they trotted down endless ramps. He woke a little to see the yellow walls passing. He looked at his dry old hand and it seemed to him that in this atmosphere, he had himself become more reptilian than human.

"I am caught by the dry, drab enturtlement of old, old age," he murmured, but the voice was weak and the robots did not hear him. They were running downward on a long meaningless concrete ramp which had become filmed by a leak of ancient oil, and they were taking care that they did not stumble and drop their precious master.

At a deep, hidden point the downward ramp divided, the left into a broad arena of steps which could have seated thousands of spectators for some never-to-occur event, and right into a narrow ramp which bore upward and then curved, yellow lights and all.

"Stop!" called Sto Odin. "Do you see her? Do you hear it?"

"Hear what?" said Flavius.

"The beat and the cadence of the congohelium, rising out of the Gebiet. The whirl and the skirl of impossible music coming at us through miles of solid rock? That girl whom I can al-

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ready see, waiting at a door which should never have been opened? The sound of the star-borne music, not designed for the proper human ear?" He shouted, "Can't you hear it? That cadence. The unlawful metal of congohelium so terribly far underground? Dah, dah. Dah, dah. Dah. Music which nobody has ever understood before?"

Said Flavius, "I hear nothing, saving the pulse of air in this corridor, and your own heartbeat, my Lord. And something else, a little like machinery, very far away."

"There, that!" cried Sto Odin, "which you call 'a little like machinery,' does it come in a beat of five separate sounds, each one distinct?"

"No. No, sir. Not five."

"And you, Livius, when you were a man, you were very telepathic? Is there any of that left in the robot which is you?"

"No, my Lord, nothing. I have good senses, and I am also cut into the subsurface radio of the Instrumentality. Nothing unusual."

"No five beat? Each note separate, short of prolonged, given meaning and shape by the terrible music of the congohelium, imprisoned with us inside this much-too-solid rock? You hear nothing?"

The two robots, shaped like Roman legionaries shook their heads.

"But I can see her, through this stone. She has breasts like ripe pears and dark brown eyes that are like the stones of fresh-cut peaches. And I can hear what they are singing, their weird silly words of a pentapaul, made into something majestic by the awful music of the congohelium. Listen to the words. When I repeat them, they sound just silly, because the dread-inspiring music does not come with them. Her name is Santuna and she stares at him. No wonder she stares. He is much more tall than most men, yet he makes this foolish song into something frightening and strange.

Slim Jim.
Dim him.
Grim.

And his name is Yebayee, but now he is Sun-boy. He has the long face and the thick lips of the first man to talk about one god and one only. Akhnaton."

"Akhnaton the pharaoh," said Flavius. "That name was known in my office when I was a man. It was a secret. One of the first and greatest of the more-than-ancient kings. You see him, my Lord?"

"Through this rock I see him. Through this rock I hear the

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delirium engendered by the congohelium. I go to him." The Lord Sto Odin stepped out of the sedan chair and beat softly and weakly against the solid stone wall of the corridor. The yellow lamps gleamed. The legionaries were helpless. Here was something which their sharp swords could not pierce. Their once-human personalities, engraved on their micro-miniaturized brains, could not make sense out of the all-too-human situation of an old, old man dreaming wild dreams in a remote tunnel.

Sto Odin leaned against the wall, breathing heavily, and said to them with a sibilant rasp:

"These are no whispers which can be missed. Can't you hear the five-beat of the congohelium, making its crazy music again? Listen to the words of this one. It's another pentapaul. Silly bony words given flesh and blood and entrails by the music which carries them. Here, listen.

Try. Vie.
Cry. Die.
Bye.

This one you did not hear either?"

"May I use my radio to ask the surface of Earth for advice?" said one of the robots.

"Advice! Advice! What advice do we need? This *is* the Gebiet and one more hour of running and you will be in the heart of the Bezirk."

He climbed back into the sedan chair and commanded, "Run, men, run! It can't be more than three or four kilometers somewhere in this warren of stone. I will guide you. If I stop guiding you, you may take my body back to the surface, so that I can be given a wonderful funeral and be shot with a rocket-coffin into space with an orbit of no return. You have nothing to worry about. You are machines, nothing more, are you not? Are you not?" His voice shrilled at the end.

Said Flavius, "Nothing more."

Said Livius, "Nothing more. And yet— "

"And yet what?" demanded the Lord Sto Odin.

"And yet," said Livius, "I know I am a machine, and I know that I have known feelings only when I was once a living man. I sometimes wonder if you people might go too far. Too far, with us robots. Too far, perhaps, with the underpeople too. Things were once simple, when everything that talked was a human being and everything which did not talk was not. You may be coming to an ending of the ways."

"If you had said that on the

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surface," said the Lord Sto Odin grimly, "your head might have been burned off by its automatic magnesium flare. You know that there you are monitored against having illegal thoughts."

"Too well do I know it," said Livius, "and I know that I must have died once as a man, if I exist here in robot form. Dying didn't seem to hurt me then and it probably won't hurt next time. But nothing really matters much when we get down this far into the earth. When we get this far down, everything changes. I never really understood that the inside of the world was this big and this sick."

"It's not how far down we are," said the Lord crossly, "it's *where* we are. This is the Gebiet, where all laws have been lifted, and down below and over yonder is the Bezirk, where laws have never been. Carry me rapidly now. I want to look on this strange musician with the face of Akhnaton and I want to talk to the girl who worships him, Santuna. Run carefully now. Up a little, to the left a little. If I sleep, do not worry. Keep going. I will waken myself when we come anywhere near that music of the congohelium. If I can hear it now, so far away, think of what it will be like when you yourselves approach it!"

He leaned back in his seat. They picked up the shafts of the sedan-chair and ran in the direction which they had been told.

VI

They had run for more than an hour, with occasional delays when they had tricky footwork over leaking pipes or damaged walkways, when the light became so bright that they had to reach in their pouches and put on sun-glasses, which looked very odd indeed underneath the Roman helmets of two fully-armed legionaries. (It was even more odd, of course, that the eyes were not eyes at all; robot eyes were like white marbles swimming in little bowls of glittering ink, producing a grimly milky stare.) They looked at their master and he had not yet stirred, so they took a corner of his robe and twisted it firmly into a bandage to protect his eyes against the bright light.

The new light made the yellow bulbs of the corridor fade out of notice. The light was like a whole aurora borealis compressed and projected through the basement corridor of a hotel left over from long ago. Neither of the robots knew the nature of the light, but it pulsed in beats of five.

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The music and the lights became obtrusive even to the two robots as they walked or trotted downward toward the center of the world. The air-forcing system must have been very strong, because the inner heat of the earth had not reached them, even at this great depth. Flavius had no idea of how many kilometers below the surface they had come. He knew that it was not much in planetary distance, but it was very far indeed for an ordinary walk.

The Lord Sto Odin sat up in the litter quite suddenly. When the two robots slowed, he said crossly at them:

"Keep going. Keep going. I am going to set myself up. I'm strong enough to do it."

He took out his manikin meee and studied it in the light of the minor aurora borealis which repeated itself in the corridor. The manikin ran through its changes of diagnoses and colors. The Lord was satisfied. With firm old fingers he put the knifetip to the back of his neck and set his output of vital energies at an even higher level.

The robots did what they had been told.

The lights had been bewildering. Sometimes they made walking itself difficult. It was hard to believe that dozens or hundreds, perhaps thousands, of human beings had found their way through these uncharted corridors in order to discover the inmost precincts of Bezirk, where all things were allowed. Yet the robots had to believe it. They themselves had been here before and they scarcely remembered how they had found their way the other time.

And the music! It beat at them harder than ever before. It came in beats of five, ringing out the tones of the pentapaul, the five-word verse which the mad catminstrel C'paul had developed while playing his c'lute some centuries before. The form itself confirmed and reinforced the poignancy of cats combined with the heartbreaking intelligence of the human being. No wonder people had found their way down here.

In all the history of man, there was no act which could not be produced by any one of the three bitterest forces in the human spirit — religious faith, vengeful vainglory or sheer vice. Here, for the sake of vice, men had found the undiscoverable deep and had put it to wild, filthy uses. The music called them on.

This was very special music. It came at Sto Odin and his legionaries in two utterly different ways by now, reverberating at them through solid rock and echoing, re-echoing through the maze of corridors, carried by the dark

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heavy air. The corridor lights were still yellow, but the electromagnetic illuminations, which kept time to the music, made the ordinary lighting seem wan. The music controlled all things, paced all time, called all life to itself. It was song of a kind which the two robots had not noticed with such intensity on their previous visit.

Even the Lord Sto Odin, for all his travels and experiences, had never heard it before.

It was all of this:

The beat and the heat and the neat repeat of the notes which poured from the congohelium — metal never made for music, matter and anti-matter locked in a fine magnetic grid to ward off the outermost perils of space. Now a piece of it was deep in the body of old Earth, counting out strange cadences. The churn and the burn and the hot return of music riding the living rock, accompanying itself in an air-carried echo. The surge and the urge of an erotic dirge which moaned, groaned through the heavy stone.

Sto Odin woke and stared sharply forward, seeing nothing but experiencing everything.

"Soon we shall see the gate and the girl," said he.

"You know this, man? *You* who have never been here before?" Livius had spoken.

"I know it," said the Lord Sto Odin, "because I know it."

"You wear the feathers of immunity."

"I wear the feathers of immunity."

"Does that mean that we, your robots, are free too, down in this Bezirk?"

"Free as you like," said the Lord Sto Odin, "provided that you do my wishes. Otherwise I shall kill you."

"If we keep going," said Flavius, "may we sing the underpeople song? It might keep some of that terrible music out of our brains. The music has all feelings and we have none. Nevertheless, it disturbs us. I do not know why."

"My radio contact with the surface has lapsed," said Livius irrelevantly. "I need to sing too."

"Go ahead, both of you," said the Lord Sto Odin. "But keep on going, or you die."

The robots lifted their voice in song:

I eat my rage.
I swallow my grief.
There's no relief
From pain or age.
Our time comes.

I work my life.
I breathe my breath.
I face my death
Without a wife.
Our time comes.

We undermen
Shove, crush and crash.
There'll be a clash
And thunder when
Our time comes.

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Though the song had the barbarous ancient thrill of bagpipes in it, the melody could not counter or cancel the sane wild rhythm of the congohelium beating at them, now, from all directions at once.

"Nice piece of sedition, that," said the Lord Sto Odin drily, "but I like it better as music than I do this noise which is tearing its way through the depths of the world. Keep going. Keep going. I must meet this mystery before I die."

"We find it hard to endure that music coming at us through the rock," said Livius.

"It seems to us that it is much stronger than it was when we came here some months ago. Could it have changed?" asked Flavius.

"*That* is the mystery. We let them have the Gebiet, beyond our own jurisdiction. We gave them the Bezirk, to do with as they please. But these ordinary people have created or encountered some extraordinary power. They have brought new things into the Earth. It may be necessary for all three of us to die before we settle the matter."

"We can't die the way you do," said Livius. "We're already robots, and the people from whom we were imprinted have been dead a long time. Do you mean you would turn us off?"

"I would, perhaps, or else some other force. Would you mind?"

"Mind? You mean, have emotions about it? I don't know," said Flavius. "I used to think that I had real, full experience when you used the phrase *summa nulla est* and brought us up to full capacity, but that music which we have been hearing has the effect of a thousand passwords all said at once. I am beginning to care about my life and I think that I am becoming what your reference explained by the word 'afraid'."

"I too feel it," said Livius. "This is not a power which we knew to exist on Earth before. When I was a strategist someone told me about the really indescribable dangers connected with the Douglas-Ouyang planets, and it seems to me now that a danger of that kind is already with us, here inside the tunnel. Something which Earth never made. Something which man never developed. Something which no robot could out-compute. Something wild and very strong brought into being by the use of the congohelium. Look around us."

He did not need to say that. The corridor itself had become a living, pulsing rainbow.

They turned one last loop in the corridor and they were there—

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The very last limit of the realm of distress.

The source of evil music.

The end of the Bezirk.

They knew it because the music blinded them, the lights deafened them, their senses ran into one another and became confused. This was the immediate presence of the congohelium.

There was a door, immensely large, carved with elaborate Gothic ornament. It was much too big for any human man to have had need of it. In the door a single figure stood, her breasts accented into vivid brights and darks by the brilliant light which poured from one side of the door only, the right.

They could see through the door, into an immense hall wherein the floor was covered by hundreds of limp bundles of ragged clothing. These were the people, unconscious. Above them and between them there danced the high figure of a male, holding a glittering something in his hands. He prowled and leaped and twisted and turned to the pulsation of the music which he himself produced.

"Summa nulla est," said the Lord Sto Odin. "I want you two robots to be keyed to maximum. Are you now to top alert?"

"We are, sir," chorused Livius and Flavius.

"You have your weapons?"

"We cannot use them," said Livius, "since it is contrary to our programming, but *you* can use them, sir."

"I'm not sure," said Flavius. "I'm not at all sure. We are equipped with surface weapons. This music, these hypnotics, these lights—who knows what they may have done to us and to our weapons, which were never designed to operate this far underground?"

"No fear," said Sto Odin, "I'll take care of all of it."

He took out a small knife.

When the knife gleamed under the dancing lights, the girl in the doorway finally took notice of the Lord Sto Odin and his strange companions.

She spoke to him, and her voice rode through the heavy air with the accents of clarity and death.

VII

"Who are you," she said, "that you should bring weapons to the last uttermost limits of the Bezirk?"

"This is just a small knife, lady," said the Lord Sto Odin, "and with this I can do no harm to anyone. I am an old man and I am setting my own vitality button higher."

She watched incuriously as he brought the point of the knife

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to the nape of his own neck and then gave it three full, deliberate turns.

Then she stared and said, "You are strange, my Lord. Perhaps you are dangerous to my friends and me."

"I am dangerous to no one." The robots looked at him, surprised, because of the fullness and the richness of his voice. He had set his vitality very high indeed, giving himself, at that rate, perhaps no more than an hour or two of life, but he had regained the physical power and the emotional force of his own prime years. They looked at the girl. She had taken Sto Odin's statement at full face value, almost as though it were an incontrovertible canon of faith.

"I wear," Sto Odin went on, "these feathers. Do you know what they signify?"

"I can see," she said, "that you are a Lord of the Instrumentality, but I do not know what the feathers mean..."

"Waiver of immunity. Anyone who can manage it is allowed to kill me or to hurt me without danger of punishment." He smiled, a little grimly. "Of course, I have the right to fight back, and I do know how to fight. My name is the Lord Sto Odin. Why are you here, girl?"

"I love that man in there—if he is a man any more."

She stopped and pursed her lips in bewilderment. It was strange to see those girlish lips compressed in a momentary stammer of the soul. She stood there, more nude than a newborn infant, her face covered with provocative, off-beat cosmetics. She lived for a mission of love in the depths of the nothing and nowhere: yet she remained a girl, a person, a human being capable, as she was now, of an immediate relationship to another human being.

"He *was* a man, my Lord, even when he came back from the surface with that piece of congohelium. Only a few weeks ago, those people were dancing too. Now they just lie on the ground. They do not even die. I myself held the congohelium too, and I made music with it. Now the power of the music is eating him up and he dances without resting. He won't come out to me and I do not dare go into that place with him. Perhaps I too would end up as one more heap on the floor."

A crescendo of the intolerable music made speech intolerable for her. She waited for it to pass while the room beyond blazed a pulsing violet at them.

When the music of the congohelium subsided a little, Sto Odin spoke: "How long has it been that he has danced alone

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with this strange power coursing through him?"

"One year. Two years. Who can tell? I came down here and lost time when I arrived. You Lords don't even let us have clocks and calendars up on the surface."

"We ourselves saw you dancing just a tenth-year ago," said Livius, interrupting.

She glanced at them, quickly, incuriously. "Are you the same two robots who were here a while back? You look very different now. You look like ancient soldiers. I can't imagine why... All right, maybe it was a week, maybe it was a year."

"What were you doing down here?" asked Sto Odin gently.

"What do you think?" she said. "Why do all the other people come down here? I was running away from the timeless time, the lifeless life, the hopeless hope that you Lords apply to all mankind on the surface. You let the robots and the underpeople work, but you freeze the real people in a happiness which has no hope and no escape."

"I'm right," cried Sto Odin, "I'm right, though I die for it!"

"I don't understand you," said the girl. "Do you mean that you too, a Lord, have come down here to escape from the useless hope that wraps up all of us?"

"No, no, no," he said, as the shifting lights of the congohelium music made improbable traceries across his features. "I just meant that I told the other Lords that something like this was happening to you ordinary people on the surface. Now you are telling me exactly what I told them. Who were you, anyhow?"

The girl glanced down at her unclothed body as though she were aware, for the first time, of her nakedness. Sto Odin could see the blush pour from her face down across her neck and chest. She said, very quietly:

"Don't you know? We never answer that question down here."

"You have rules?" he said. "You people have rules, even here in the Bezirk?"

She brightened up when she realized that he had not meant the indecent question as an impropriety. Eagerly she explained, "There aren't any rules. They are just understandings. Somebody told me when I left the ordinary world and crossed the line of the Gebiet. I suppose they did not tell you because you were a Lord, or because they hid from your strange war-robots."

"I met no one, coming down."

"Then they were hiding from you, my Lord."

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Sto Odin looked around at his legionaries to see if they would confirm that statement but neither Flavius nor Livius said anything at all.

He turned back to the girl. "I didn't mean to pry. Can you tell me what kind of person you are? I don't need the particulars."

"When I was alive, I was a once-born," she said. "I did not live long enough to be renewed. The robots and a Subcommissioner of the Instrumentality took a look at me to see if I could be trained for the Instrumentality. More than enough brains, they said, but no character at all. I thought about that a long time. 'No character at all.' I knew I couldn't kill my self, and I didn't want to live, so I looked happy every time I thought a monitor might be scanning me and I found my way to the Gebiet. It wasn't death, and it wasn't life, but it was an escape from endless fun. I hadn't been down here long —" she pointed at the Gebiet above them — "before I met him. We loved each other very soon and he said that the Gebiet was not much improvement on the surface. He said he had already been down here, in the Bezirk looking for a fun-death."

"A what?" said Sto Odin, as if he could not believe the words.

"A fun-death. Those were his words and his idea. I followed him around and we loved each other. I waited for him when he went to the surface to get the congohelium. I thought that his love for me would put the fun-death out of his mind."

"Are you telling me the whole truth?" said Sto Odin. "Or is this just your part of the story?"

She stammered protests but he did not ask again.

The Lord Sto Odin said nothing but he looked heavily at her.

She winced, bit her lip, and finally said, through all the music and the lights, very clearly indeed, "Stop it. You are hurting me."

The Lord Sto Odin stared at her, said innocently, "I am doing nothing," and stared on. There was much to stare at. She was a girl the color of honey. Even through these lights and shadows he could see that she had no clothing at all. Nor did she have a single hair left on her body — no head of hair, no eyebrows, probably no eyelashes, though he could not tell at that distance. She had traced golden eyebrows far up on her forehead, giving her the look of endless mocking inquiry. She had painted her mouth gold, so that when she spoke, her words cascaded from a golden source. She had painted her upper eyelids gold-

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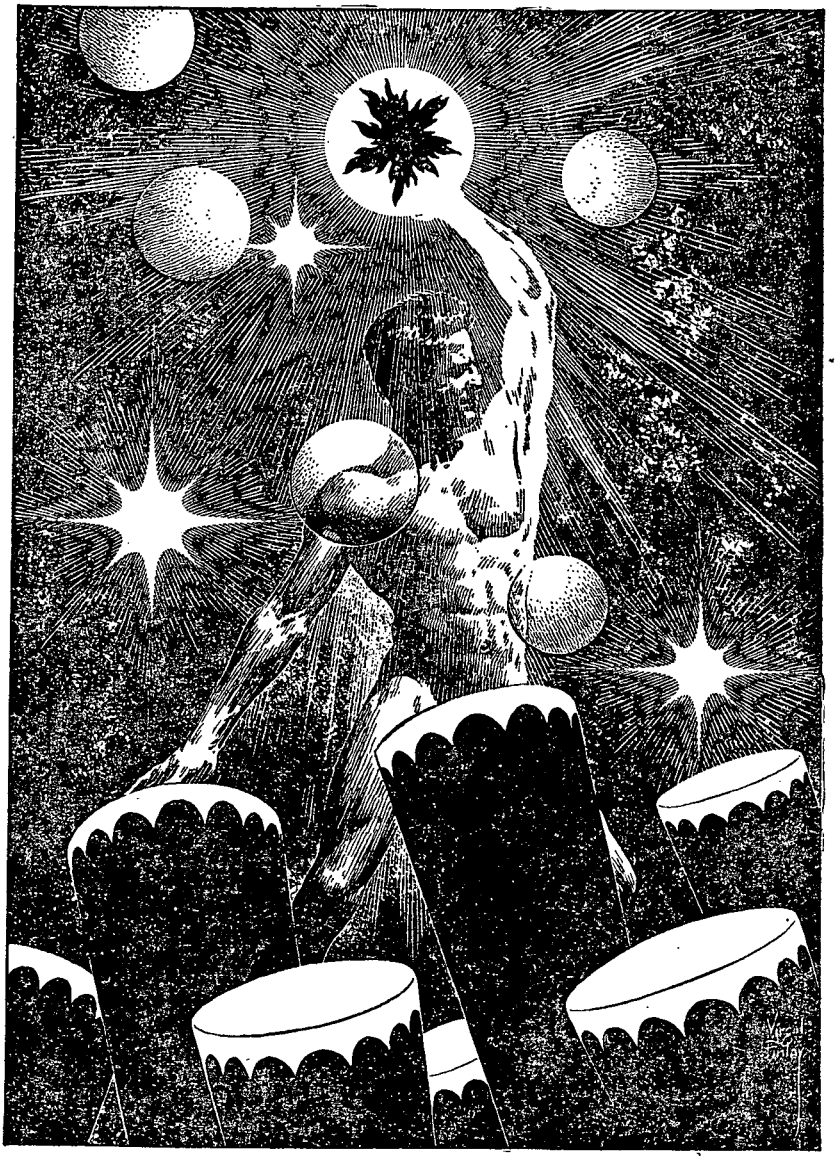

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en too, but the lower were black as carbon itself. The total effect was alien to all the previous experiences of mankind: it was lascivious grief to the thousandth power, dry wantonness perpetually unfulfilled, femaleness in the service of remote purposes, humanity enraptured by strange planets.

He stood and stared. If she were still human at all, this would sooner or later force her to take the initiative. It did.

She spoke again, "Who are you? You are living too fast, too fiercely. Why don't you go in and dance, like all the others?" She gestured past the open door, where the ragged unconscious shapes of all the people lay strewn about the floor.

"You call that dancing?" said the Lord Sto Odin. "I do not. There is one man who dances. Those others lie on the floor. Let me ask you the same question. Why don't you dance yourself?"

"I want *him*, not the dance. I am Santuna and he seized me once in human, mortal, ordinary love. But he becomes Sun-boy, more so every day, and he dances with those people who lie on the floor —"

"You call that dancing?" snapped the Lord Sto Odin. He shook his head and added grimly, "I see no dance."

"You don't see it? You really don't see it?" she cried.

He shook his head obstinately and grimly.

She turned so that she looked into the room beyond her and she brought her high, clear penetrating wail which even cut through the five-beat pulse of the congohelium. She cried:

"Sun-boy, Sun-boy, hear me!"

There was no break in the quick escape of the feet which pattered in the figure eight, no slowing down the fingers which beat against the shimmering nonfocus of the metal which was carried in the dancer's arms.

"My lover, my beloved, my man!" she cried again, her voice even more shrill and demanding than before.

There was a break in the cadence of the music and the dance. The dancer sheered toward them with a perceptible slowing down of his cadence. The lights of the inner room, the great door and the outer hall all became more steady. Sto Odin could see the girl more clearly; she really didn't have a single hair on her body. He could see the dancer too; the young man was tall, thin beyond the ordinary suffering of man, and the metal which he carried shimmered like water reflecting a thousand lights. The dancer

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spoke, quickly and angrily:

"You called me. You have called me thousands of times. Come on in, if you wish. But don't call me."

As he spoke, the music faded out completely, the bundles on the floor began to stir and to groan and to awaken.

Santuna stammered hastily, "This time it wasn't me. It was these people. One of them is very strong. He cannot see the dancers."

The Sun-boy turned to the Lord Sto Odin, "Come in and dance then, if you wish. You are already here. You might as well. Those machines of yours —" he nodded at the robot-legionaries — "they couldn't dance anyhow. Turn them off." The dancer started to turn away.

"I shall not dance, but I would like to see it," said Sto Odin, with enforced mildness. He did not like this young man at all —not the phosphorescence of his skin, the dangerous metal cradled in his arm, the suicidal recklessness of his prancing walk. Anyhow, there was too much light this far underground and too few explanations of what was being done.

"Man, you're a peeper. That's real nasty, for an old man like you. Or do you just want to be a *man*?"

The Lord Sto Odin felt his temper flare up. "Who are you, man, that you should call man *man* in such a tone? Aren't you still human, yourself?"

"Who knows? Who cares? I have tapped the music of the universe. I have piped all imaginable happiness into this room. I am generous. I share it with these friends of mine." Sun-boy gestured at the ragged heaps on the floor, who had begun to squirm in their misery without the music. As Sto Odin saw into the room more clearly, he could see that the bundles on the floor were young people, mostly young men, though there were a few girls among them. They all of them looked sick and weak and pale.

Sto Odin retorted. "I don't like the looks of this. I have half a mind to seize you and to take that metal."

The dancer spun on the ball of his right foot, as though to leap away in a wild prance.

The Lord Sto Odin stepped into the room after Sun-boy.

Sun-boy turned full circle, so that he faced Sto Odin once again. He pushed the Lord out of the door, marching him firmly but irresistably three steps backward.

"Flavius, seize the metal. Livius, take the man," spat Sto Odin.

Neither robot moved.

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Sto Odin, his senses and his strength set high by the severe twist upward which he had given his vitality button, stepped forward to seize the congohelium himself. Made one step and no more: he froze in the doorway, immobile.

He had not felt like that since the last time the doctors put him in a surgery machine, when they found that part of his skull had developed bone-cancer from old, old radiation in space and from the subsequent effects of sheer age. They had given him a prosthetic half-skull and for the time of the operation he had been immobilized by straps and drugs. This time there were no straps, no drugs, but the forces which Sun-boy had invoked were equally strong.

The dancer danced in an enormous figure-8 among the clothed bodies lying on the floor. He had been singing the song which the robot Flavius had repeated far up above, on the surface of the Earth — the song about the weeping man.

But Sun-boy did not weep.

His ascetic, thin face was twisted in a broad grin of mockery. When he sang about sorrow it was not sorrow which he really expressed, but derision, laughter, contempt for ordinary human sorrow. The congohelium shimmered and the aurora borealis almost blinded Sto Odin. There were two other drums in the middle of the room, one with high notes and the other with even higher ones.

The congohelium resonated: *boom — boom — doom — doom — room!*

The large ordinary drum rattled out, when Sun-boy passed at and reached out his fingers: *ritiplin, ritiplin, rataplan, ritiplin*!

The small, strange drum emitted only two notes, and it almost croaked them: *kid-nork, kid-nork, kid-nork!*

As Sun-boy danced back the Lord Sto Odin thought that he could hear the voice of the girl Santuna, calling to Sun-boy, but he could not turn his head to see if she were speaking.

Sun-boy stood in front of Sto Odin, his feet still weaving as he danced, his thumbs and his palms torturing hypnotic dissonances from the gleaming congohelium.

"Old man, you tried to trick me. You failed."

The Lord Sto Odin tried to speak, but the muscles of his mouth and throat would not respond. He wondered what force this was which could stop all unusual effort but still leave his heart free to beat, his lungs to breathe, his brain (both natural and prosthetic) to think.

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The boy danced on. He danced away a few steps, turned and danced back to Sto Odin.

"You wear the feathers of immunity. I am free to kill you. If I did the Lady Mmona and the Lord Nuru-or and your other friends would never know what happened."

If Sto Odin could have moved his eyelids that much, he would have opened his eyes in astonishment at the discovery that a superstitious dancer, far under ground, knew the secret business of the Instrumentality.

"You can't believe what you are looking at, even though you see it plainly," said Sun-boy more seriously. "You think that a lunatic has found a way to work wonders with a piece of the congohelium taken far underground. Foolish old man! No ordinary lunatic would have carried this metal down here without blowing up the fragment and himself with it. No man could have done what I have done. You are thinking. If the gambler who took the name Sun-boy is not a man, what is he? What brings the power and music of the sun so far down under ground? Who makes the wretched ones of the world dream in a crazy, happy sleep while their life spills and leaks into a thousand kinds of times, a thousand kinds of worlds? Who does it, if it is not mere me? You don't have to ask. I can tell perfectly well what you are thinking. I'll dance it for you. I am a very kind man, even though you do not like me."

The dancer's feet had been moving in the same place while he spoke.

Suddenly he whirled away, leaping and vaulting over the wretched human figures on the floor.

He passed the big drum and touched it: *ritiplin, rataplan*!

Left hand brushed the little drum: *kid-nork, kid-nork!*

Both hands seized the congohelium, as though the strong wrists were going to tear it apart.

The whole room blazed with music, gleamed with thunder as the human senses interpenetrated each other. The Lord Sto Odin felt the air pass his skin like cool wet oil. Sun-boy the dancer became transparent and through him the Lord Sto Odin could see a landscape which was not earth and never would be.

"Fluminescent, luminescent, incandescent, fluorescent," sang the dancer. "Those are the worlds of the Douglas-Ouyang planets, seven planets in a close group, all travelling together around a single sun. Worlds of wild magnetism and perpetual

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dustfall, where the surfaces of the planets are changed by the forever-shifting magnetism of their erratic orbits! Strange worlds, where stars dance dances wilder than any dance ever conceived by man— Planets which have a consciousness in common, but perhaps not intelligence — planets which called across all space and all time for companionship until *I*, me the gambler, came down to this cavern and found them. Where you had left them, my Lord Sto Odin, when you said to a robot:

"'I do not like the looks of those planets,' said you, Sto Odin, speaking to a robot a long time ago. 'People might get sick or crazy, just looking at them,' said you, Sto Odin, long, long ago. 'Hide the knowledge in some out of the way computer,' you commanded, Sto Odin, before I was born. But the computer was that one, that one in the corner behind you, which you cannot turn to see. I came down to this room, looking for a fun-suicide, something really unusual which would bang the noddies when they found I had gotten away. I danced here in the darkness, almost the way I am dancing now, and I had taken about twelve different kinds of drugs, so that I was wild and free and very very receptive. That computer spoke to me, Sto Odin. *Your* computer, not mine. It spoke to me, and you know what it said?

"You might as well know, Sto Odin, because you are dying. You set your vitality high in order to fight me. I have made you stand still. Could I do that if I were a mere man? Look. I will turn solid again."

With a rainbow-like scream of chords and sounds, Sun-boy twisted the congohelium again until both the inner chamber and the outer bloomed with lights of a thousand colors and the deep underground air became drenched with music which seemed psychotic, because no human mind had ever invented it. The Lord Sto Odin, imprisoned in his own body with his two legionary-robots frozen half a pace behind him, wondered if he really were dying in vain and tried to guess whether he would be blinded and deafened by this dancer before he died. The congohelium twisted and shone before him.

Sun-boy danced backward over the bodies on the floor, danced backward with an odd cadenced run which looked as though he were plunging forward in a wild, competitive footrace when the music and his own footsteps carried him back, toward the center of the inner room. The figure jumped in an

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odd stance, face looking so far downward that Sun-boy might have been studying his own steps on the floor, the congohelium held above and behind his neck, legs lifting high in the cruel high-kneed prance.

The Lord Sto Odin thought he could hear the girl calling again, but he could not distinguish words.

The drums spoke again: *ritiplin, ritiplin, rataplan!* and then *kid-nork, kid-nork, kid-nork!*

The dancer spoke as the pandemonium subsided. He spoke, as his voice was high, strange, like a bad recording played on the wrong machine:

"The something is talking to you. You can talk."

The Lord Sto Odin found that his throat and lips moved. Quietly, secretly, like an old soldier, he tried his feet and fingers: these did not move. Only his voice could be used. He spoke, and he said the obvious:

"Who are you, *something*?"

Sun-boy looked across at Sto Odin. He stood erect and calm. Only his feet moved, and they did a wild, agile little jig which did not affect the rest of his body. Apparently some kind of dance was necessary to keep the connection going between the unexplained reach of the Douglas-Ouyang planets, the piece of the congohelium, the more than human dancer and the tortured blissful figures on the floor. The face, the face itself was quite composed and almost sad.

"I have been told," said Sun-boy, "to show you who I am."

He danced around the drums *rataplan, rataplan! kid-nork-nork, kid-nork, kid-nork-nork!*

He held the congohelium high and wrenched it so that a great moan came out. Sto Odin felt sure that a sound as wild and forlorn as that would be sure to reach the surface of the earth many kilometers above, but his prudent judgment assured him that this was a fanciful thought, gestated by his personal situation, and that any real sound strong enough to reach all the way to the surface would also be strong enough to bring the bruised and shattered rock of the ceiling pouring down upon their heads.

The congohelium ran down the colors of the spectrum until it stopped at a dark, wet liver-red, very close to black.

The Lord Sto Odin, in that momentary near silence, found that the entire story had been thrust into his mind without being strung out and articulated with words. The true history of this chamber had entered his memory sidewise, as it were. In

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one moment he knew nothing of it; in the next instance it was as if he had remembered the whole narrative for most of his life.

He also felt himself set free.

He stumbled backward three or four steps.

To his immense relief, his robots turned around, themselves free, and accompanied him. He let them put their hands in his armpits.

His face was suddenly covered with kisses.

His plastic cheek felt, thinly and dimly, the imprint, real and living, of female human lips. It was the odd girl— beautiful, bald, naked and golden-lipped — who had waited and shouted from the door.

Despite physical fatigue and the sudden shock of intruded knowledge, the Lord Sto Odin knew what he had to say.

"Girl, you shouted for me."

"Yes, my Lord."

"You have had the strength to watch the congohelium and not to give in to it?"

She nodded but said nothing.

"You have been strong-willed enough not to go into that room?"

"Not strong-willed, my Lord. I just love him, my man in there."

"You have waited, girl, for many months?"

"Not all the time. I go up the corridor when I have to eat or drink or sleep or do my personals. I even have mirrors and combs and tweezers and paint there, to make myself beautiful, the way that Sun-boy might want me."

The Lord Sto Odin looked over his shoulder. The music was low and keening with some emotions other than grief. The dancer was doing a long, slow dance, full of creeping and reaches, as he passed the congohelium from one hand to the other. "Do you hear me, dancer?" called the Lord Sto Odin, the Instrumentality once more coursing through his veins.

The dancer did not speak nor seem to change his course. But *kid-nork, kid-nork* said the little drum, quite unexpectedly.

"He, and the face behind him — they will let the girl leave if she really forgets him and this place in the act of leaving. Won't you?" said Sto Odin to the dancer.

Ritiplin, rataplan said the big drum, which had not sounded since Sto Odin was let free.

"But I don't want to go," said the girl.

"I know you don't want to go. You will go to please me. You can come back as soon as I have done my work." She stood mute so he continued.

"One of my robots, Livius, the

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one imprinted by a psychiatrist general, will run with you, but I command him to forget this place and all things connected with it. Summa nulla est. Have you heard me, Livius? You will run with this girl and you will forget. You will run and forget. You too will run and forget, Santuna my dear, but two Earth-nychtherons from now you will remember just enough to come back here, should you wish to, should you need to. Otherwise you will go to the Lady Mmona and learn from her what you should do for the rest of your life."

"You are promising, my Lord, that in two days and nights I can come back if I even feel like it."

"Now run, my girl, run. Run to the surface. Livius, carry her if you must. But run! run! run! More than she depends upon it."

Santuna looked at him very earnestly. Her nakedness was innocence. The gold upper eyelids met the black lower eyelids as she blinked and then brushed away wet tears.

"Kiss me," she said, "and I will run."

He leaned down and kissed her.

She turned, looked back one last time at her dancer-lover, and then ran long-legged into the corridor. Livius ran after her, gracefully, untiringly. In twenty minutes they would be reaching the upper limits of the Gebiet.

"You know what I am doing?" said Sto Odin to the dancer.

This time the dancer and the force behind him did not deign to answer.

Said Sto Odin, "Water. There is water in a jug in my litter. Take me there, Flavius."

The robot-legionary took the aged and trembling Sto Odin to the litter.

VIII

The Lord Sto Odin then performed the trick which changed human history for many centuries to come and, in so doing, exploded an enormous cavern in the vitals of the earth.

He used one of the most secret ruses of the Instrumentality.

He triple-thought.

Only a few very adept persons could triple-think, when they were given every possible chance of training. Fortunately for mankind, the Lord Sto Odin had been one of the successful ones.

He set three systems of thought into action. At the top level he behaved rationally as he explored the old room; at a lower level of his mind he planned a wild surprise for the dancer with the congohelium. But

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at the third, lowest level, he decided what he must do in the time of a single blink and trusted his autonomic nervous system to carry out the rest.

These are the commands he gave:

Flavius should be set on the wild-alert and readied for attack.

The computer should be reached and told to record the whole episode, everything which Sto Odin had learned, and should be shown how to take countermeasures while Sto Odin gave the matter no further conscious thought. The gestalt of action — the general frame of retaliation— was clear for thousandths of a second in Sto Odin's mind and then it dropped from sight.

The music rose to a roar.

White light covered Sto Odin.

"You meant me harm!" called Sun-boy from beyond the Gothic door.

"I meant you harm," Sto Odin acknowledged, "but it was a passing thought. I did nothing. You are watching me."

"I am watching you," said the dancer grimly. *Kid-nork, kid-nork* went the little drum. "Do not go out of my sight. When you are ready to come through my door, call me or just think of it. I will meet you and help you in."

"Good enough," said the Lord Sto Odin.

Flavius still held him. Sto Odin concentrated on the melody which Sun-boy was creating, a wild new song never before suspected in the history of the world. He wondered if he could surprise the dancer by throwing his own song back at him. At the same instant, his fingers were performing a third set of actions which Sto Odin's mind no longer had to heed. Sto Odin's hand opened a lid in the robot's chest, right into the laminated controls of the brain. The hand itself changed certain adjustments, commanding that the robot should within the quarter-hour, kill all forms of life within reach other than the command-transmitter. Flavius did not know what had been done to him; Sto Odin did not even notice what his own hand had done.

"Take me over to the old computer," said Sto Odin to the robot Flavius. "I want to discover how the strange story which I have just learned may be true." Sto Odin kept thinking of music which would even startle the user of the congo-helium.

He stood at the computer.

His hand, responding to the triple-think command which it had been given, turned the com-

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puter up and pressed the button, *Record this scene.* The computer's old relays almost grunted as they came to the alert and complied.

"Let me see the map," said Sto Odin to the computer.

Far behind him, the dancer had changed his pace into a fast jog-trot of hot suspicion.

The map appeared on the computer.

"Beautiful," said Sto Odin.

The entire labyrinth had become plain. Just above them was one of the ancient, sealed-off anti-seismic shafts — a straight, empty tubular shaft, two hundred meters wide, kilometers high. At the top, it had a lid which kept out the mud and water of the ocean floor. At the bottom, since there was no pressure other than air to worry about, it had been covered with a plastic which looked like rock, so that neither people nor robots which might be passing would try to climb into it.

"Watch what I am doing!" cried Sto Odin to the dancer.

"I am watching," said Sun-boy and there was almost a growl of perplexity in his sung-forth response.

Sto Odin shook the computer and ran the fingers of his right hand over it and coded a very specific request. His left hand —preconditioned by the triple-think, coded the emergency panel at the side of the computer with two simple, clear engineering instructions.

Sun-boy's laughter rang out behind him. "You are asking that a piece of the congohelium be sent down to you. Stop! Stop, before you sign it with your name and your authority as a Lord of the Instrumentality. Your unsigned request will do no harm. The Central Computer up top will just think that it is some of the crazy people in the Bezirk making senseless demands." The voice rose to a note of urgency, "Why did the machine signal 'received and complied with' to you just now?"

The Lord Sto Odin lied blandly, "I don't know. Maybe they will send me a piece of the congohelium to match the one that you have there."

"You're lying," cried the dancer. "Come over here to the door."

Flavius led the Lord Sto Odin to the ridiculous-beautiful Gothic archway.

The dancer was leaping from foot to foot. The congohelium shone a dull alert red. The music wept as though all the anger and suspicion of mankind had been incorporated into a new unforgettable fugue, like a delirious atonal counterpoint to Johann

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Sebastian Bach's *Third Brandenburg Concerto.*

"I am here." The Lord Sto Odin spoke easily.

"You are dying!" cried the dancer.

"I was dying before you first noticed me. I set my vitality control to maximum after I entered the Bezirk."

"Come on in, then," said Sun-boy, "and you will never die."

Sto Odin took the edge of the door and let himself down to the stone floor. Only when he was comfortably seated did he speak:

"I am dying, that is true. But I would rather not come in. I will just watch you dance as I die."

"What are you doing? What have you done?" cried Sun-boy. He stopped dancing and walked over to the door.

"Search me if you wish," said the Lord Sto Odin.

"I am searching you," said the dancer, "but I see nothing but your desire to get a piece of the congohelium for yourself and to out-dance me."

At this point Flavius went berserk. He ran back to the litter, leaned over, and ran toward the door. In each hand he carried an enormous solid-steel bearing.

"What's that robot doing?" cried the dancer. "I can see your mind but you are not telling him anything! He uses those steel balls to break obstructions —"

He gasped as the attack came.

Quicker than the eye could follow the movement, Flavius' sixty-ton-capacity arm whistled through the air as he flung the first steel missile directly at Sun-boy. Sun-boy, or the power within him, leapt aside with insect speed. The ball plowed through two of the rag-clothed human bodies on the floor. One body said *whoof*! as it died, but the other body let out no sound at all: the head had been torn off in first impact. Before the dancer could speak, Flavius flung the second ball.

This time the doorway caught it. The powers which had immobilized Sto Odin and his robots were back in operation. The ball sang as it plunged into the doorway, stopped in mid-air, sang again as the door flung it back at Flavius.

The returning ball missed Flavius' head but crushed his chest utterly. That was where his real brain was. There was a flicker of light as the robot went out, but even in dying Flavius seized the ball one last time and flung it at Sun-boy. The robot terminated operation and the heavy

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ball, flung wild, caught the Lord Sto Odin in the right shoulder. The Lord Sto Odin felt pain until he dragged over his manikin meee and turned all pain off. Then he looked at the shoulder. It was almost totally demolished. Blood from his organic body and hydraulic fluid from his prosthetics joined in a slow, heavy stream as the liquids met, merged and poured down his side.

The dancer almost forgot to dance.

Sto Odin wondered how far the girl had gone.

The air pressure changed.

"What is happening to the air? Why did you think about the girl? What is happening?"

"Read me," said the Lord Sto Odin.

"I will dance and get my powers first," said Sun-boy.

For a few brief minutes it seemed that the dancer with the congohelium would cause a rockfall.

The Lord Sto Odin, dying, closed his eyes and found that it was restful to die. The blaze and noise of the world around him remained interesting, but had become unimportant.

The congohelium with a thousand shifting rainbows and the dancer had attained near-transparency when Sun-boy came back to read Sto Odin's mind.

"I see nothing," said Sun-boy worriedly. "Your vitality button is too high and you will die soon. Where is all that air coming from? I seem to hear a far-away roar. But you are not causing it. Your robot went wild. All you do is to look at me contentedly and die. That is very strange. You want to die your way when you could live unimaginable lives in here with us!"

"That is right," said the Lord Sto Odin. "I am dying my way. But dance for me, do dance for me with the congohelium, while I tell you your own story as you told it to me. It would be a pleasure to get the story straight before I die."

The dancer looked irresolute, started to dance, and then turned back to the Lord Sto Odin.

"Are you sure you want to die right away? With the power of what you call the Douglas-Ouyang planets, which I receive right here with the help of the congohelium, you could be comfortable enough while I danced and you could still die whenever you wished. Vitality buttons are much weaker than the powers which I command. I could even help to lift you across the threshold of my door . . ."

"No," said the Lord Sto Odin. "Just dance for me while I die. My way."

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IX

Thus the world turned. Millions of tons of water were rushing toward them.

Within minutes the Gebiet and the Bezirk would drown as the air whistled upward. Sto Odin noted contentedly that there was an air-shaft at the top of the dancer's room. He did not allow himself to third-think of what would happen when the matter and antimatter of the congohelium were immersed in rushing salt water. Something like forty megatons, he supposed, with the tired feeling of a man who has thought a problem through long, long ago and remembers it briefly only after the situation has long passed.

Sun-boy was acting out religion before the age of space. He chorused hymns, he lifted his eyes and his hands and his piece of the congohelium to the sun; he played the rattle of whirling dervishes, the temple bells of the Man on the Two Pieces of Wood and the other temple bells of that saint who had escaped time simply by seeing it and stepping out of it. Buddha, was that his name? And he went on to the severe profanities which afflicted mankind after the Old World fell.

The music kept measure.

And the lights, too.

Whole processions of ghostly shadows followed Sun-boy as he showed how old mankind had found the gods, and the sun, and then other gods. He pantomimed man's most ancient mystery — that man pretended to be afraid of death, when it was life that never understood it.

And as he danced, the Lord Sto Odin repeated his own story to him:

"You fled the surface, Sun-boy, because the people were stupid clods, happy and dull in their miserable happiness. You fled because you could not stand being a chicken in a poultry house, antiseptically bred, safely housed and frozen when dead. You joined the other miserable, bright restless people who sought freedom in the Gebiet. You learned about the drugs and their liquors and their smokes. You knew their women, and their parties, and their games. It wasn't enough. You became a gentleman-suicide, a hero seeking a fun-death which would stamp you with your individuality. You came on down to the Bezirk, the most forgotten and loathesome place of all. You found nothing. Just the old machines and the empty corridors. Here and there a few mummies or bones. Just the silent lights and the faint murmur of air through the corridors."

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"I hear water now," said the dancer, still dancing, "rushing water. Don't you hear it, my dying Lord?"

"If I did hear it, I wouldn't care. Let's get on with your story. You came to this room. The weird door made it look like a good place for a fun-death, such as you poor castaways liked to seek, except that there was not much sport in dying unless other people know that you did it intentionally, and know how you did it. Anyway, it was a long climb back up into the Gebiet, where your friends were, so you slept by this computer.

"In the night, while you slept, as you dreamed, the computer sang to you:

> I need a temporary dog
> For a temporary job
> On a temporary place
> Like earth!

When you woke up you were surprised to find that you had dreamed an entire new kind of music. Really wild music which made people shudder with its delicious evil. And with the music, you had a job. To steal a piece of the congohelium.

"You were a clever man, Sun-boy, before the trip down here. The Douglas-Ouyang planets caught you and made you a thousand times cleverer. You and your friends, this is what you told me—or what the presence behind you told me, just a half hour ago—you and your friends stole a subspace communicator console, got a fix on the Douglas-Ouyang planets, and got drunk at the sight. Iridescent, luminescent. Waterfalls uphill. All that kind of thing.

"And you did get the congohelium. The congohelium is made of matter and antimatter laminated apart by a dual magnetic grid. With that the presence of the Douglas-Ouyang planets made you independent of organic processes. You did not need food or rest or even air or drink any more. The Douglas-Ouyang planets are very old. They kept you as a link. I have no idea of what they intended to do with Earth and with mankind. If this story gets out, future generations will call you the merchant of menace, because you used the normal human appetitiousness for danger to trap other people with hypnotics and with music."

"I hear water," interrupted Sun-boy. "I *do* hear water!"

"Never mind," said the Lord Sto Odin, "your story is more important. Anyhow, what could you and I do about it? I am dying, sitting in a pool of blood and effluvium. You can't leave this room with the congo-

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helium. Let me go on. Or perhaps the Douglas-Ouyang entity, whatever it was—"

"*Is*," said Sun-boy.

"—whatever it is, may just have been longing for sensuous companionship. Dance on, man, dance on."

Sun-boy danced and the drums talked with him, *rataplan, rataplan! kid-nork, kid-nork, nork*! while the congohelium made music scream through the solid rock.

The other sound persisted.

Sun-boy stopped and stared.

"It is water. It *is*."

"Who knows?" said the Lord Sto Odin.

"Look," screamed Sun-boy, holding the congohelium high. "Look!"

The Lord Sto Odin did not need to look. He knew full well that the first few tons of water, mud-laden and heavy, had come frothing down the corridor and into their rooms.

"But what do *I* do?" screamed the voice of Sun-boy. Sto Odin felt that it was not Sun-boy speaking, but some relay speaking from the power of the Douglas-Ouyang planets. A power which had tried to find friendship with man, but had found the wrong man and the wrong friendship.

Sun-boy took control of himself. His feet splashed in the water as he danced. The colors shone on the water as it rose. *Ritiplin, tiplin!* said the big drum. *Kid-nork, kid-nork,* said the little drum. *Boom, boom, doom, doom, room,* said the congohelium.

The Lord Sto Odin felt his old eyes blur but he could still see the blazing image of the wild dancer.

"This is a good way to die," thought he, as he died.

X

Far above, on the surface of the Planet, Santuna felt the continent itself heave beneath her feet and saw the eastern horizon grow dark as a volcano of muddy steam shot up from the calm blue sunlit ocean.

"This must not, must *not* happen again!" she said, thinking of Sun-boy and the congohelium and the death of the Lord Sto Odin.

"Something must be done about it," she added to herself.

And she did it.

In later centuries she brought disease, risk and misery back to increase the happiness of man. She was one of the principal architects of the Rediscovery of Man, and at her most famous she was known as the Lady Alice More.

— CORDWAINER SMITH

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Courting Time

by TOM PURDOM

What a grand thing it would be, if he were the only man in the world —and they were the only Group!

Inside the great ballroom, two hundred guests swept around the floor in the vast complex patterns of Djalan Gambir's latest creation, a stately, flowing variation on the Viennese Waltz punctuated by variations on some of the less inhibited Oriental, Spanish and African dances. As was the custom, each invitation had included a learning program, designed for home computers, which had taught each guest his role in Djalan's choreography. The hospitality of the Zest family was elaborate, expensive—and flawless.

Verino Schell stood by the wine bowl trying to look brooding and mysterious while the other males his age were all out on the floor yelling and making erotic motions at the girls. To fit him into the party at the last minute, Leeba Zest had unfortunately been forced to get him the invitation of one of her older male friends. Most of his partners in the waltzes were women old enough to be his mother, and whenever the dancing became a little strenuous, the program gently eased him to the sidelines.

His hungry eyes were locked on the three husbands and four wives of the Zest family, and the stocky, animated figure of Djalan Gambir. He looked at Leeba more than he should have. All around him murmuring voices stabbed at his heart.

"Did you hear? George says

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it's definite. They'll announce Djalan's going to marry the family on Sunday."

"I hear Rafe has a judge standing by. As soon as the other six agree—bam!"

"John, Rafe and Kelios can't wait to get somebody to take the girls out again. Sometimes I think I should have tried a group marriage."

For the first time in his life he was staring defeat in the face. For the first time in his life he had looked at something he wanted—Leeba's body, Leeba's blonde hair, Leeba's sensitive face and shrewd, appraising eyes—and he had known with all his being he could never have it. Sometime before the end of the four day party Rafael Zest was producing here in Ibadan, Djalan Gambir was going to propose to the Zest family, and six spouses were going to accept with pleasure. And Leeba was going to acquiesce for the good of the family. Djalan Gambir was better equipped to take Gus's place in the Zest group marriage, to be the lover and the playboy who gave the girls a good time, than any man in the Solar System.

"How can you have enough hope to even try?" Leeba had asked him. "We're tormenting ourselves for nothing. I'll help you, but what good will it do? Everybody in the family knows you're too involved in your music. Even if you were the kind of husband we need—don't you think they know you only want to marry them so you can marry me? They aren't stupid, Veri."

The music faded. According to the program, there would now be a half hour devoted to improvisation. Most of the dancers bowed to their partners and headed for the winebowl.

His heart pounded. He had noted this period when he studied his program.

Djalan Gambir led Margaret Zest onto the dance floor. On the balcony a small woodwind section shrieked the first raucous notes of a modern Chinese courting dance. Margaret put her hands behind her head and Djalan began stamping around her in a wide circle.

Verino stepped toward the dance floor. Unnerving images flashed across his consciousness. Djalan Gambir bedding in one night three women whose pleasures every sane male in the Solar System considered the ultimate in erotic experience . . . Djalan Gambir at twenty-three winning undying fame by descending alone into the terrifying atmosphere and gravity of Jupiter . . . Djalan Gambir pursued by the women of six continents and four

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space colonies . . . turning down a thousand invitations a year . . . teaching the human race how to dance, how to play, how to *enjoy* . . .

He danced between Margaret and Djalan. Tossing back the thick conductor's forelock he affected, he faced Djalan and stamped hard twice.

The hall stirred. Dancing contests were common, but few men challenged the finest amateur dancer in the Solar System.

If Djalan was surprised, he didn't show it. He stamped back and bowed. *Take her. Show us what you can do.*

Margaret smiled. Her face said she was revelling in the fantasy as much as he had guessed she would. In the center of a great stage two men were competing for her attention.

She was the mother of the Zest family, the wife in charge of raising the children, and according to Leeba she did her job well not because she particularly liked children, but because she had an intense compulsion to do something meaningful with her life. From the way she had studied him as he came down the reception line, he was certain she was intense about other things. She couldn't have been more frank if she had asked him for a tape of his last sexual performance. Small, serious, almost dull, as a wife of the Zest family her erotic experience had been vastly superior to what she might have enjoyed with the kind of husband she would have attracted if she had chosen monogamy.

He clapped for faster music. The dancers still on the floor retreated to the sidelines.

"Hold on, Margaret!"

"I held on to Djalan, I can hold on to you!"

His arms slid around her and they hurtled toward the far wall.

He shouted for the wildest dances he knew. Cellos sang. Drums clattered. Brass and woodwind made harsh, savage noises. With every dance their bodies became less and less inhibited. The hall whirled around them like a carousel. Filling her consciousness with his tall form and laughing face, he accelerated the tempo until they were both moving at a pace which should have exhausted them, and then he held them there monotonously, repeating one simple step over and over, until her head went back, and her smile fixed, and he knew he had induced total abandon.

He broke the rhythm so suddenly she gasped. Laughing his biggest laugh, whirled them down the hall and spun her off the end of his arm at Djalan Gambir.

Djalan caught her without

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missing a beat. Soon the amateurs were doing a ballet so slow, intricate and beautiful Verino the professional musician choked on his own pleasure.

Behind him he heard spectators murmuring. His own performance had been crude compared to this. It didn't matter. For the rest of her life, if he had succeeded, every time Margaret thought of frenzied excitement she would think of Verino Schell. Modern social dancing was a language and a physical pleasure. but it was also a drug, a stimulant and an anti-inhibitant as potent in expert hands as heroin or alcohol. A modern expert could achieve in minutes the personality changes primitive dancers had achieved only after hours and days.

He approached Fileesa Zest during the bufet supper. She and John Zest, the artist, were standing by a winebowl with half a dozen guests. A large, friendly girl, Fileesa was the Zest careewoman, a first-rate historian and socio-economic forecaster. He had met her several times at the Zest apartments, during the months when he had been giving Leeba private music lessons, and they had easily become friends.

"Hello, Veri," Fileesa greeted him. "That was quite a performance. Do you treat all the girls that way?"

John Zest studied him over his wine glass. The rest of the group looked at him with polite curiosity. By now everyone at the party knew who he was and why he was there.

"Only the ones I can get close to," he said. "What's the latest on the economic outlook?"

"Just as dull as ever. I was just telling everyone it looks like the U.S. minimum wage will be twenty-seven thousand by the end of the year."

He shook his head. "Every time it goes up another thousand I get two thousand more people trying to join one of my choirs. And I've got more groups already than I can handle."

"Can't you organize bigger groups?"

"I've already got two groups with over a thousand voices. When they get bigger than that one conductor can't handle them."

Her eyes lit up. Locating obstacles to economic progress was one of her specialties. "What if you had better equipment? Have you seen Corrington's new Command and Control unit?"

"I've looked at everything on the market."

"This just went on the market last month."

A few minutes later they realized they were the only people left in the group. John was on

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the other side of the wine bowl heatedly defending his theories about art and the others had all drifted away one by one. The conversation had gotten technical without either of them noticing it.

"I've done it again," Fileesa said. "Have I been boring you, too?"

"I'm as guilty as you are." He hesitated and then decided he could be straightforward. "You know I like serious talk just as much as you do—unlike Djalan."

She scowled. "Are you going to propose to us?"

"Yes."

"You're making a mistake."

"You won't vote for me? I've been hoping you would."

"What about your work? You can't give that up! You're only beginning."

"I've thought about all that. Believe me — I've spent the last three months trying to make up my mind about this. I'll cut back to composing and doing concerts just for the record. I'm doing more work than I want to anyway. I'd rather do less and have time to think about it."

"You'd still have to spend hours a day studying. Even if you eventually did nothing but record, you still need to do all the conducting you're doing now. You need the experience. You could be one of the finest conductors since recording! If you marry us, you'll just be a talented amateur."

Kelios Zest was striding toward them across the dance floor.

"Let's talk about it when we've got time," he said. "When can I see you alone?"

"Leeba isn't —"

He turned to greet Kelios. "I'll call you tomorrow."

Kelios and Terita were the host and hostess on the antigravity platform he was assigned to for the midnight ride through Nigeria's famous mahogany forests. There was a big crowd around them — attracted by Terita — but he maneuvered into the inner circle without provoking more anger than he could joke off.

He had seen Terita's voluptuous image hundreds of times. He had never met her, however, until they shook hands in the reception line. In person she looked oddly unpretentious, more like a girl you could romp with than a love goddess. She stayed at the railing and as the platform drifted over the trees she kept pointing to the birds and animals and making exciting comments.

By the time the four platforms turned back toward the hotel, he was standing beside her and they were taking turns imitating the wildlife they saw. He loved the way she laughed. When she dou-

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bled over with her arms wrapped around her just below her famous breasts, laughing with her whole body like a child, he almost forgot that on the platform just ahead Leeba was the hostess and Djalan Gambir was not quite the host.

Kelios didn't enjoy their antics. He was usually a lively, friendly man, but according to Leeba he definitely wanted Djalan Gambir for a husband. The father of the family, Margaret's partner in the important task of rearing sixteen children, Kelios thought the best recreation in the world was a book or a learning program; after a year and a half without Gus — who had died in a speedboat crash — he was looking forward to weekends spent in the peace and quiet of his study. He looked brooding and thoughtful throughout most of the ride. When Terita teased him about his long face, he smiled tightly and eventually moved to the other side of the platform.

Leeba phoned Verino's room just before he went to bed. She looked depressed.

"I just had a goodnight drink with Teri," he said. "I think she likes me."

"Don't get overconfident. We've got a long way to go."

"Have I got Djalan worried yet?"

"He never gets worried. He just wishes you weren't here." She shook her head. "You always have a good time, don't you? I wish I could enjoy this."

"I haven't enjoyed anything since the last time I touched you."

Her face softened. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. If you couldn't put up a good front, we wouldn't stand a chance."

"What can I do about John, Rafe and Kelios?"

"That's what makes me feel helpless. If it were just the girls and if we had more time . . . If I hadn't promised you I'd try, and if it were somebody less resourceful than you, I'd tell you to go home right now."

His arms quivered as he automatically started to reach out and comfort her. His body ached with desire. Telephones were among the many things love had made him hate.

"I'll think of something," he said. "Don't give up on me, Leeb. Put the pressure on this brain of mine and it always comes up with something."

"I wish I could believe you. I thought I'd accepted living without you, but now it looks even bleaker than it did. I don't know if I can do it. I always thought emotions like that were a myth, but now I look at the future and I get cold."

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He blew her a kiss. "Go to bed. When we wake up tomorrow, we'll know exactly what to do."

After she hung up he stared at the blank screen. He had almost suggested monogamy again. If she felt that way, perhaps he should have. But they had been over all that. Complex societies created complex people — and complex people had complex needs. He might be necessary, but so were John, Rafe and Kelios.

He went to bed but he was too excited to sleep. The Zest family pounded on his consciousness as if they were voices in an unbearably complex piece of music.

The phone woke him up just before noon. He answered it without turning on the screen.

"Verino? Rafe Zest. Did I wake you up? I'm sorry. Can you come up to my suite?"

He shook the sleep out of his brain. "Give me twenty minutes."

"Right."

He got up and told the hotel control unit he wanted breakfast. He still felt over stimulated. He had felt this way before, but he couldn't place why or when. It was a strange mood and it bothered him. Yesterday's events had been interesting, but they hadn't been more inherently exciting than the work and pleasure which crowded all his days.

Rafe had installed a portable command and control unit in front of his living room couch. When Verino entered the room, he was speaking Chinese to one of the screens arranged along the front of the cabinet. He looked up and waved his guest to a chair. Two other screens were blinking to let him know he had calls waiting.

Verino's Chinese was rusty. He thought he heard something about contacting the greatest living Chinese poet, and he caught the Chinese for "Let me run it through the computer" — which Rafe promptly did — but that was all he understood.

This was a big year for the family money maker. To celebrate fifty years of economic progress, in January the General Assembly had decreed that the year 2050 was to be a year of general festivity, the World Fair Year. For the first time in history every man, woman and child alive was supposed to take a trip around the world. All the cities and nations of the Earth were vying for the attention of six billion tourists. For fifteen percent of the gross, in addition to his innumerable other enterprises, Rafe was promoting nine cities, including Paris and Ibadan. This year, for the first time, the Zest family income was supposed to

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exceed one hundred million; a prospect which was probably of some importance to a man such as Djalan Gambir who had lived for twenty-two years as a perpetual guest.

Rafe switched off the Chinese call. "I'm sorry! When I called you, it was quiet!" He switched on two screens at once and started talking German while he studied the tapes coming out of the computer and the teletype.

"*Auf Wiedersehen.*" Rafe switched off the screens and stood up. "X calls only," he told the unit. "Would you like a drink, Veri?"

"I think I'll stick to coffee."

Rafe stabbed a finger at the suite control unit. "Send out a pot of coffee!" He dropped the computer tape and instantly picked up a piece of sculpturer's plastic which was lying on an end table. Even when he was relatively idle, he had to be constantly reshaping some part of the world. "John and Kelios and I had a conference this morning. We decided I'd better talk to you."

Verino pushed back his forelock. "What's on your mind?" He still felt odd. What was bothering him? Why couldn't he classify his own emotions?

"Don't think we don't like you," Rafe said. "Everybody in the family likes you. If we could fit you in, we'd be proud to have you in the family. You'd bring us as much honor as John or Fileesa. You haven't accomplished what they have, but you will. It shows." He held the plastic in front of his chest and squeezed it flat between his palms. "You can't get us to marry you by coming here and turning your charm on the girls. We need a certain kind of person and you don't fit the equation. If we let you try to take Gus's place, it would be the biggest mistake you or we ever made."

"I've thought about that—"

"I know what you told Fileesa. She agrees with me. In a year you'd be working as hard as ever. You can't help it. And what happens to us? Do you think I want a wife nagging me to take her out when I've got a big project accelerating? Because the guy that took Gus's place has a big concert this weekend?"

Verino's heart jumped violently. His eyes widened. Leeba! He had felt this way the morning after the night he first met Leeba!

"Do you think Fileesa wants a husband who'll be busy when she decides it's time she let herself go and had a fling? We chose group marriage to get away from that kind of thing."

Verino stood up. On the cabi-

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net screens were blinking. Through the window he could see the fantastic shapes of new hotel and apartment buildings rising above the forest — buildings that wouldn't have been there if it hadn't been for Rafe and the family that supported Rafe.

It was incredible! No wonder he hadn't understood his own feelings!

"You don't understand," he said. "I'm in love. You can't reason with love. You can say yes or no, but you can't reason with it."

"That's another thing. Leeba—"

He threw up his hands. An immense choir towered above his head. Thousands of voices, seven soloists — eight! include Gus — all the joyous, triumphant, complex life of the Twenty-First Century . . . the wealth . . . the planets . . . mankind confounding the pessimists and mastering the challenge created by its own inventiveness . . . men and women developing personalities and institutions complex enough to match the complexities of the environment men and women had created . . .

"Not Leeba! *You!* Your family! The Twenty-First Century!"

Rafe stared at him as if he'd suddenly gone crazy.

He backed toward the door. Nothing he could say could express it. Hallellujahs thundered in his brain. They would hear what he was hearing! They would feel what he was feeling!

"Where are you going?" Rafe yelled at his back. "What's wrong with you? *We can't marry you!*"

The jet back to Cleveland was crowded with tourists but he hardly noticed. Dictating furiously, on fire with emotion, he pieced together the music he needed from his memory and from the libraries he could contact from the plane. Wherever he had to, he altered it and wrote connecting passages. He didn't have time to write anything original. Even if he'd had the time, no composer who had ever lived could have written what he wanted.

The Corrington people were efficient. The Command and Control unit he had ordered from the plane was waiting for him in his rehearsal hall. He sat down at the console and started to work. The computer gave him a cost estimate, including transportation, in less than four minutes. Assuming he only had to pay the soloists, and half the other voices would pay him, his credit balance would just cover it.

He put the computer to work making reservations. While it was doing that, he vocally programmed it to hunt down the soloists

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he wanted, and to contact the people who would help him assemble the two thousand voices he needed. As Fileesa had told him, the unit could take raw information and deliver it to any person in the world with whatever psychological coloring the operator ordered.

Time was a raging monster gnawing at his back. He rehearsed until his body ached and the scores blurred in front of the performers' eyes. Half the choir thought he needed a psych checkup; singers stamped out proclaiming the project was impossible; effects which were child's play for the individual performer had to be coordinated by the conductor with hands, feet and elbows — and by Saturday night two thousand voices rang with the passion and energy of his vision.

"This will be one of the marvels of the Fair," he told them just before they left for Ibadan. "It may be one of the events of the century. You'll be watching tapes of it for the rest of your lives."

Their faces said they believed him. He might be mad, but he was the kind of madman people followed.

The climax of the Zest party was the most elaborate entertainment Djalan Gambir had ever created, a long variation on *Romeo and Juliet,* in costume, and with parts for every guest. Before the day ended, every family friend and hanger-on would receive a total escape into fantasy, all the fighting, drinking, loving, pageantry and tragedy any human psyche could possibly need.

On the roof of the hotel, milling through a detailed recreation of a section of Verona, the guests were beginning to immerse themselves in the fantasy. The gravity had been reduced by ten per cent, just enough to make the oldest muscles feel fresh and youthful, and in the middle of the crowd John Zest and a dozen other men were energetically imitating the brawling Montagues and Capulets.

Leeba pointed her fan at the horizon. "What's that?"

Rafe followed her arm. "By my troth!" His hand leaped to his sword hilt. By his usual enthusiasm he had become a Renaissance gallant the moment he stepped into the afternoon sun. "Verino! Now what?"

Leeba covered her open mouth with her hand. All over the mock city people turned to look. John and his companions noticed the commotion and stopped hacking each other long enough to see what was happening. Djalan and Rafe exchanged ominous glances.

A flock of anti-gravity plat-

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forms was drifting toward the roof. At the center of a moving amphitheatre four platforms high, alone on a platform of his own, Verino Schell stood behind some kind of control unit and his long arms moved in time with a full orchestra and the soft moaning of thirty choirs.

The platforms encircled the roof. The Renaissance lords and ladies looked up and chattered excitedly. Erect and solemn, Verino floated above the crowd to the exact center of the roof.

Rafe marched through the crowd and pointed his sword at Verino. "What is this, Verino? Who gave you the —"

Verino threw out his arm. A single tenor voice speared the afternoon. The chorus moaned frantically.

"If you don't leave, we'll call the police!"

Verino's arms leaped out. He told the control unit something and lights flashed on the cabinet. One after another seven voices announced their presence.

Rafe shook his sword. Leeba gasped and looked up with sudden comprehension. The eight voices interwove in complex, unexpected patterns, each one singing a song of its own. Verino kicked a pedal in the bottom of the control unit and the choir sprang into life. Suddenly the air was full of Bach, *The Heavens Laugh, The Earth Rejoices.*

Leeba ran forward and grabbed Rafe's arm. "It's us. Listen to it! Listen!"

Djalan Gambir tightened his grip on Margaret's arm. "He told Rafe he loves us," Margaret whispered. "It's incredible."

Rafe lowered his sword. "What good will it do?" Twelve feet above his head the thunder of the gods mingled with the noise of six billion people rejoicing in their luck — and four men and women led the celebration.

"Listen to him anyway!" Leeba yelled. "Give him that much! Look what he's done for us!"

"We can't marry him. We'll stir ourselves up for nothing."

The music roared on. Awed and subdued, the Zest family stared at the gigantic mirror Verino had created. They wanted him to stop and they couldn't turn away. Beside the reality beating on their ears, the masquerade on the roof suddenly seemed empty.

In all their years of careful, trained listening, nothing like this had ever assaulted their emotions. To create the right expression for his vision, Verino had collaborated with the masters of ten centuries. Sullivan's *Celebration for Universal Disarmament;* the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's last symphony; the masses and

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requiems of Bach, Brahms, Vivaldi and Berlioz; the great music created during this last half century, when the human race had finally been liberated from drudgery and ignorance — he had put it all together in a work so complex and awesome it was as if all those generations had labored with this moment in mind. He was showing them what they were. He had hung the Twenty-First Century in the sky.

Shortly after sundown, hours after the storm had appeared on the horizon, all the platforms except Verino's began to float toward the stars. Bits and pieces of music mingled as if representatives of all the centuries had appeared in the heavens. High in the air, just as the last platform faded from view, the music reached a far off climax.

Verino bowed to his audience. Even in the flickering torchlight he could see he had overpowered them. Terita was actually sobbing. On the edge of the roof Rafe was shaking his head.

Fileesa stood up and applauded. Rafe stood up with her, and then John and Kelios. Everyone on the roof was applauding! The noise rolled up to him as if they were two thousand instead of two hundred.

A strange cry touched the edge of his consciousness. Something shiny flew at him through the torchlight. He ducked and metal clattered on the platform behind him.

All over the roof women screamed. Djalan Gambir ran out of the crowd and leaped at the platform. His fingers gripped the edge and held.

Verino stared at the clutching fingers. He looked back and saw a sword lying beside the control unit.

Djalan swung himself forward and then somersaulted backward and leaped onto the platform. Rage distorted his face. He pulled his sword from its scabbard and charged.

Verino threw up his hands. A vivid picture of Djalan descending toward Jupiter in a tiny, cramped sphere flashed across his mind. Djalan had risked his life so he could rise from obscurity to world fame and now he was willing to risk death and imprisonment for the Zest fortune. Years of pleasant living hadn't changed his basic personality.

Djalan lunged and Verino hopped out of the way. Down below he could hear all the commotion of a general panic. John, Rafe and Kelio were running toward the platform. Fileesa was screaming like a lunatic.

He grabbed the sword Djalan had thrown at him.

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Djalan growled and lunged. Verino jumped back and raised the long, unwieldy Renaissance weapon to something resembling the on guard position. He had never handled a sword or a fencing foil in his life.

Djalan lunged again. Verino hacked at the oncoming blade. Steel slithered along steel. The hard, brutal-looking point missed his chest by half an inch.

"You'll go to jail, Djalan!"

"I'll kill you."

Djalan lunged. Verino parried clumsily and saw the other point slide under his blade and plunge toward his stomach. He leaped back three feet before he knew what had happened. Djalan stamped forward and lunged again.

The platform tilted. Verino lurched to one side. Holding his sword with both hands, he beat down Djalan's blade. His heart was thumping with panic. Hands were clinging to the end of the platform, but the others weren't as athletic as Djalan.

He pressed Djalan's blade against the platform. For a moment they glared at each other. "This is ridiculous! What are you trying to do?"

Djalan jumped back and freed his sword. The platform lurched again. Verino stumbled and Djalan stepped forward and lunged.

Rafe came over the side of the platform. Something hard thudded on Verino's head and neck. His sword fell out of his hand. He moaned and toppled over.

"It's the only solution," Rafe said. For once the Solar System's leading entreperneur didn't look enthusiastic. "It's expensive and I'm not happy with it — a ten spouse family is getting unwieldy — but you forced us into it. Nobody wants to give either of you up. Even the girls won't give Djalan up after he risked going to jail for us. I'm certain Djalan thought about that, of course. He claims he was overcome by passion." He shook his head. "Are you sure you two didn't plan this?"

"If you'd seen that point coming toward you," Verino said, "you wouldn't ask that. Have you picked out the girl yet?"

Rafe grinned. "There's a girl at my office in Benares that John and I have been eyeing for months. The girls don't exactly like somebody that young joining the group, but they know they can't argue. The competition will do them good. You'll see. Married life is no party."

"Will it be a triple wedding?"

"Right. In two weeks. Do you think you can work up the music for us?"

Verino stared out the window at the mahogany forest. "Sure."

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"Isn't it enough time? You did the other thing in two days."

Two weeks . . . Was he doing the right thing? Suppose his emotions weren't as strong as he had thought they were? What about that blonde in his chamber chorus who had been making eyes at him for the last few months?

He hardly knew these people!

"It's fine, Rafe. Plenty of time."

He stuck his hands in his pockets so Rafe couldn't see they were shaking. If it had been happening to someone else, he would have laughed. Ten minutes after his proposal had been accepted, and he had the bridegroom jitters.

TOM PURDOM

FORECAST

A couple of years ago a rather astonishingly good complete short science-fiction novel came in, and when we printed it we made the prediction that it might well win science fiction's annual award of merit, the Hugo. As it turned out, we were right: The story was Jack Vance's *The Dragon Masters,* and it, with its lovely illustrations by Jack Gaughan, decorated our August, 1962 issue.

Now we have a new one by Vance coming up in our next. The name of it is *The Last Castle,* and it takes place right here on Earth — but on an Earth in the very remote future, where the strongpoints of humanity are immense castles, each with its surrounding square miles of feudal territory; where men have developed strange alliances and antagonisms with the Meks, the Birds — and each other. In every story Jack Vance writes, there is poetry and color. This is no exception.

Is it as good as *The Dragon Masters?*

We'll say this much — it is very, very good. As to the rest, why not come around next issue and see for yourself?

Of course, we'll have the usual array of additional stories and departments to back it up — a fine novelette by Frank Herbert called *The Primitives,* another by Robert Silverberg called *Lazarus Come Forth!,* features by Algis Budrys and Willy Ley . . .

We think April, 1966, will be a good issue — and, as a matter of fact, we think 1966 is going to be full of good issues!

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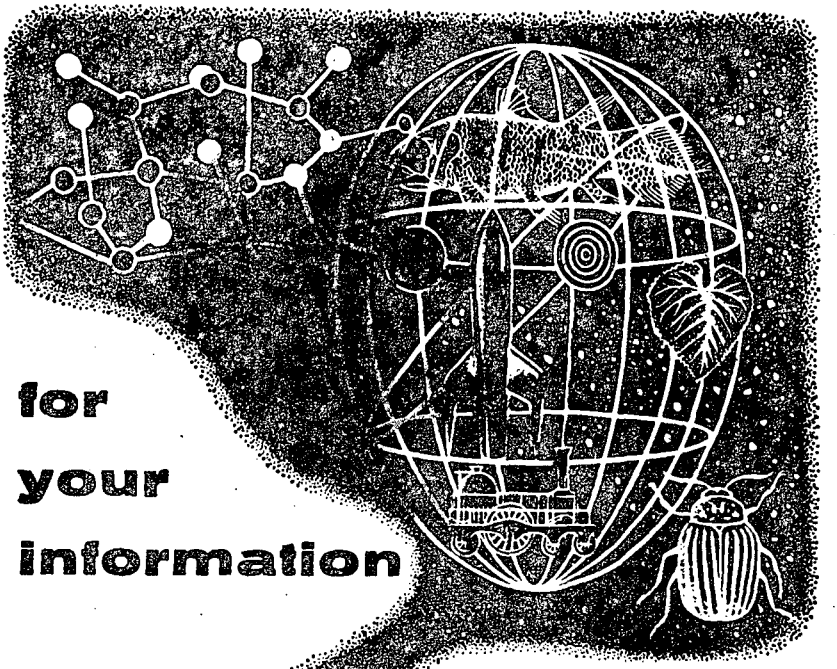
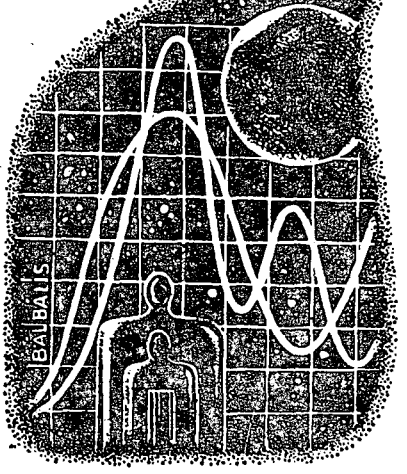


for your information

BY WILLY LEY



The Wreck of LA LUTINE

It was the Year VIII of the French Republic, and all of Europe (where the same year was called 1799 A.D.) was trying to recover from the wars they had fought against this republic. Italy had been overwhelmed by the French. The areas now known as Belgium and The Netherlands were ruled by

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the French too and Prussia and Austria, as well as Spain, had been forced to sign peace treaties they did not like at all.

The only major power in western Europe that had not been defeated was Great Britain. In fact, in some respects it was better off in the "Year VIII" than it had been when the French Republic had been founded. The British fleet had defeated the French whenever they met, Great Britain's colonial possessions had grown by annexing former French colonies and, while the French had fought battles all over the map of Europe, the British had extended their trade and achieved general prosperity.

One other place was prosperous too, the independent seaport of Hamburg.

Hamburg had been a seaport ever since it had been founded. While it had never been poverty stricken, it had not become important until (and because of) the American Revolutionary War. Some quirk of commercial fate had channelled lots of trade through Hamburg because the Thirteen Colonies wanted to be independent. The many wars against revolutionary France had brought additional trade to Hamburg and while Hamburg's commercial interests had been opposed to those of Great Britain in 1776 and for a few years after, both now pulled the same commercial rope.

Hamburg got all the trade that would have gone to Holland under normal conditions. But there was a problem: the available cash did not match the increase of the trade volume.

It is reported that the banks had to charge an interest rate of 30 per cent for loans, which was about equal to the profits the merchants would have made if they had had enough cash on hand. But the sea captains that carried the merchandise — most of them Scandinavians — wanted to be paid. And while the local banks could get almost any interest rate they charged, they were handicapped by lack of cash too. Logically the merchants of Hamburg sent out a cry for help to the bankers of London. And the latter were only too pleased to help; it was a clear-cut case of one hand washing the other.

The London bankers, in a very short time, got the sum of 24 million dollars together. Most of it was in gold coins, the remainder consisted of bars of gold and silver which the City of Hamburg could use to mint their own coin. The problem was to get the treasure to Hamburg.

While there was no longer a French fleet there were still

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French ships prowling the North Sea and the Channel. A commercial vessel traveling under military escort would only attract attention. The Londoners decided on using a vessel which they had captured from the French a few years earlier. It was a fast-sailing and heavily armed warship named *La Lutine* — the English had not even bothered to change the name. The gold and silver were quietly loaded in barrels and boxes which did not betray their contents by their appearance. The cargo might as well have been so many barrels of salted herring and boxes of soap.

La Lutine carried the unusually large crew of 300 men, many of them armed to repel a possible enemy attack. She was ready to sail early in October 1799. The captain waited for a few days for good weather and cast off a few hours after sunset on October 9th.

The weather was good, the wind was favorable and by midnight the ship — which had sailed from Yarmouth, the easternmost point of England — had covered more than half the distance. But then a strong storm came from the northeast, blowing in the direction of Holland.

Several hours later the storm-blown ship reached the string of islands to the north of Holland — presumably its original coastline — and ran aground near the island of Terschelling.[28] *La Lutine* capsized immediately and sank.[29] Only two of its large crew survived.

The merchants of Hamburg must have managed somehow to survive their financial crisis. The merchants and bankers of London quietly approached Lloyd's of London, which had insured vessel and cargo, and collected. And the two surviving sailors spread the tale of the gold.

The government of the Batavian Republic — which was the name of Holland at the moment — acted promptly by declaring that the treasure on board the sunken vessel was government property. But that is the only action the government took; for some reason nobody was in a hurry.

Two years later an order was issued to try and salvage the money. This order went to the local authorities and they ascertained that the wreck was accessable at low tide. Hence local fishermen were sworn in and told to see what they could do. The fishermen went to work with oyster forks and long-handled nets and succeeded in extracting about a million dollars worth of gold bars and coins

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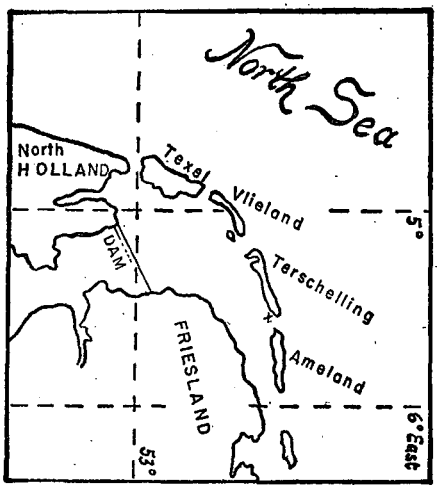

Fig. 1.
X marks the spot, as usual, in this case a spot where 20 million dollars in gold are waiting for skilled and ingenious rescuers.

during the summer and fall of 1801. But during the winter 1801-02 currents shifted and in the spring of 1802 *La Lutine* was no longer visible. In fact she had been covered up with a layer of sand estimated to have been 50 or 60 feet in thickness.

In 1814 Napoleon was finally defeated. Peace was established and with it a new Kingdom of the Netherlands, ruled by Willem Frederik of Orange who called himself Willem I. Of course he knew the story of *La Lutine* but seems to have been convinced all along that salvage was impossible. When approached by a group of Dutch merchants and bankers in 1821 he chartered a "Privileged Salvage Company" without hesitation, merely stipulating that one half of everything recovered was to be handed over to the crown.

While the new company sent experienced men to Terschelling to study the situation and to make recommendations about the procedure to be followed, Lloyd's of London and the financial community felt glum. The war was over. The gold on board *La Lutine* was British gold. And even though it was located in Dutch waters they had hoped to get it back one day.

They petitioned their king — George IV — who approached Willem I.

Willem wanted to show that he was England's friend and did not really believe that the treasure could be salvaged. The thing to do was to issue an edict that the money on board of *La Lutine* was British Crown Property. George IV, in turn, conferred the property to Lloyd's, and Lloyd's made an arrangement with the Privileged Salvage Company which now represented British interests. But the signing of the various documents was the only thing that did happen; *La Lutine* was buried under a layer of sand that seemed to grow thicker every year.

From 1823, the year the trans-

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fer of the property had taken place, until 1857 nothing happened at all. The "asset" of about 23 million dollars in gold could not be approached. But in 1857 the currents shifted again. Now the sea began to take away the sand it had piled up for half a century. In 1858 the wreck became actually accessible and men wearing the newly invented diving suits went to work.

They happened to have access to the place where the gold bars had been stored, and within three months they recovered half a million dollars worth. But then came the winter and a new shift of currents. In Spring 1859 the wreck was covered with sand again, but the layer was only a few feet thick and the divers thought that they could continue, at least in a few places around the wreck. For a while they were right. During 1859 and 1860 they recovered another one and a half million dollars worth of gold. But the sand layer grew in thickness and by the end of 1860 the work was discontinued.

But this was also the time when a new profession, the engineer, was in the ascendancy. Engineers are naturally of the opinion that obstacles can be overcome by good engineering. After all, they had invented a workable diving suit and meanwhile they had also invented dredging devices with buckets on endless chains. Such "digging ladders" as they were called, steam-powered, of course, should be able to do the job. The mechanical diggers would remove the sand and then the divers would be able to do the fine work and remove the gold.

Operation Steam Dredge got underway in 1866.

The concept had been correct, it was merely a case of the currents being stronger. Also the currents worked twenty-four hours a day all year round, while the dredging operation worked only in summer and in good weather. The result of seven years of work consisted of 20,000 dollars in gold coins.

It was disheartening and the only solace consisted in the sure knowledge that the treasure was there. The Privileged Salvage Company did not chase a rumor that might or might not be true, it just battled difficulties that might diminish again. And, after all, the engineers built new machines all the time. At some time better machinery and better conditions would come together.

Every year a new attempt was made but the success was negligible; the salvaged precious metal paid only a few per cent of

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the cost. In 1900 the company declared officially that it no longer considered the venture possible and asked to be released from its contract.

The financial circles of London remained optimistic, and one can hardly differ.

It was a fact that there were over 20 million dollars in gold left in the wreck. The depth of the water was virtually negligible any good diver could put in three to four hours of work at that depth. The sand was the only problem and where the digging ladders had failed suction pumps ought to be successful.

A firm specializing in such work, the "National Salvage Association", felt certain of both its financial strength and its engineering ability and offered a contract to Lloyd's and to the Dutch Company. It said, in substance, that the National Salvage Association would salvage the treasure of *La Lutine* at its own expense and would keep 70 per cent of the gold recovered, 15 per cent would go to Lloyd's and 15 per cent to the Dutch group.

Since the Dutch group had given up hope, even 15 per cent was a windfall it would mean three million dollars if the British actually recovered the treasure. The managers of Lloyd's reasoned the same way and both signed the contract.

The National Salvage Association did not waste money on trying what had been tried before. It was ridiculous that divers spend time under water trying to pick out single coins from the sand. The job of the divers was obviously to guide the machinery that would do all the actual work.

An available steamship was adapted for the specific job of recovering *La Lutine's* gold. A large wire-mesh cage was built at the stern of the salvage vessel, overhanging the stern for a distance of about 15 feet. A large pipe that could be lengthened or shortened and that had a diameter of about two feet, was attached amidships. Underwater electric lamps were hanging from cables to provide illumination for the divers, and hooks and grapples also hung overboard so that the divers could attach heavy objects — say a money barrel that was still intact — to be hoisted aboard. (A few gun barrels, an anchor and the ship's bell were salvaged that way.) But the main plan of action relied on the pipe which was connected with a powerful suction pump. The water and sand sucked up through that pipe was conveyed

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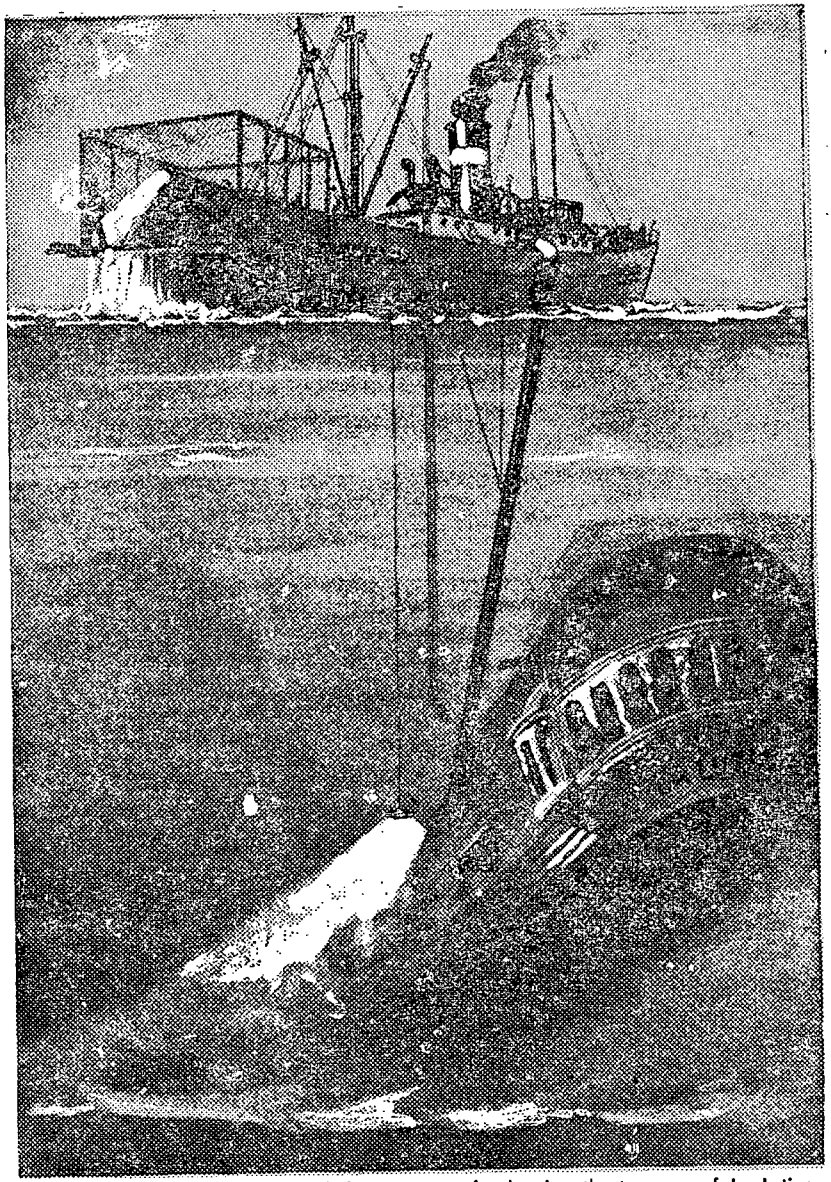

Fig. 2. Contemporary drawing of the attempts of salvaging the treasure of La Lutine before the first World War.

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into the wire-mesh cage at the stern of the vessel. The water and the sand would thereby be discharged into the sea, but anything else, especially loose coins, would stay in the cage, to be collected at intervals. It was all very carefully thought out: the suction pump would gradually "excavate" the wreck so that the divers could go to work in the ship's interior and all incidental salvage was purely mechanical.

The work began in 1911 and everything looked promising.

There had been only one unknown factor and that was the amount of sand that the current would deposit on and around the wreck. It turned out that the current carried more sand per hour than the suction pump could remove.

Well, if the current was the real culprit there was still another way. One could change the path of the current and one did not even need new equipment.

If a channel at the bottom of the shallow sea provided a short cut for the flow of the current, no new sand would be deposited on the wreck. It was even possibile that some sand would be removed. After carefully checking the path of the current and studying all the associated problems the solution emerged.

It would need a channel running in a certain direction which had to be slightly over 6000 feet long. The channel would also have to be fairly deep, so that the total amount of sand to be moved would be about 1½ million tons. But the suction pump on board the salvage vessel could handle the job, if given time.

Unfortunately the weather was generally bad in the area all through 1912 so that the total number of hours during which the vessel could work was just about 300. But in the spring of 1913 the job was finished and all the calculations had been proved correct.

After the channel had been finished the wreck of *La Lutine* could be exposed quickly. By July 1913 the midship section was accessable and the divers reported that there was a gap in the hull. It was too small to enter but the divers could reach in and feel around and they were sure that they felt stacked bars of metal. The next step was, obviously, that the gap had to be widened so that the divers would be able to enter the hold of the ship and do the job for which everything else had been only preliminaries.

Several days later the divers went back to the wreck, this time equipped with tools to widen the hole, trailing cables for

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hoisting the treasure aboard the salvage vessel.

A sight they tried not to believe greeted them. Of course the removal of the sand had created a hollow in the bottom . . . and the wreck had turned and slid into the hollow, with the gap in the hull at the bottom!

I don't know whether compressed air drills existed in 1913. They would have been the tool to use under the circumstances all that had to be done was to make a sufficiently large hole in the undamaged side of the hull that was then topmost. Of course the National Salvage Association did not tell in fine detail just what they did—no use giving pointers to competitors. At any event they resumed work during the spring of 1914, without issuing any statements except the obvious one in August 1914 that operations would be suspended for the duration of the war.

To everybody's surprise work was not resumed after the first World War, or if anything was done it must have been on such a minor scale that the newspapers did not say anything.

To the best of my knowledge the 20 million dollars in gold are still there—I shall refrain from paging Arthur C. Clarke at this point. One discovery of sunken treasure is enough per person. Besides, the gold of *La Lutine* does not need to be discovered. Even if currents of the sea should have shifted the position of the wreck it must be in an area corresponding to about a city block.

The two remaining questions are whether the recovery will still be worthwhile and how we would go about it nowadays.

The first question can be answered relatively easily. Gold coins worth 20 million dollars in 1900 would be worth about 40 million dollars now—just considered as metal, that is. If the pieces were in new condition when they were loaded aboard the ship they would have a still higher value as collector's items, let's say about 110 million dollars.

As the finds of perfectly preserved Spanish doubloons in sunken ships just south of Cape Kennedy have proved once more, gold coins do not deteriorate in sea water.

In short, the salvage of the hoard of *La Lutine* would be worthwhile if the salvage operations can be carried out for less than 50 million dollars of current purchasing power. Whether that can be done would depend on the thickness of the sand layer on the wreck right now

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and the distance in feet from the surface of the North Sea at high tide to the wreck.

A modern salvage operation would probably try to keep the currents away from the wreck by building a wall around it. It would be quite similar to any dam-building operation, by dropping blocks of anything that is cheap and will not float. Once the wreck has been walled in there are two possibilities.

The more intriguing one would be to build up this wall to a few feet above high-tide level, making the wall waterproof with sheets of bitumen and concrete and pumping out the "well" so that salvage workers can go to work. But this would be the more expensive solution — and this also happens to be an area where storm-driven floods grow ten or twelve feet taller than normal high tide.

But one can work very nicely under water, if the water is quiet and not too deep. Of all the known sunken treasure ships the famous *La Lutine* rests at the shallowest depth. And a wall around the wreck would keep the water quiet. Maybe there are some people sitting around right now in Amsterdam or in London thinking about salvage.

Even if there aren't, it is still possible that the Dutch will salvage the treasure of *La Lutine* as a by-product of another project. The string of islands along the Dutch coast, collectively known as the West Frisian Islands, indicates, as has been said, the original coastline. The portion of the North Sea between this string of islands and the mainland is known as the *Waddenzee* and is quite shallow, though it is made difficult by fast-flowing currents. Ever since Dutch engineers succeeded in recovering the area covered for centuries by the Zuider Zee, another set of Dutch engineers and scientists has been dreaming about dams from Den Helder on the mainland to the island of Texel, then a dam from Texel to the next island (Vlieland), then one between Vlieland and Terschelling, one from Terschelling to Ameland and finally one from Ameland to the mainland.

At the moment this is not even a project, in spite of (or possibly because of) cost estimates that have been made. But eventually it will be done. And after it has been done *La Lutine* will become accessible again. And her gold may help to amortize the cost of the dam-building project a little bit faster than cautious actuaries, who have to ignore such possibilities, have calculated. — WILLY LEY

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The wars were long over, but something remained of all their noisy strife —

THE ECHO OF WRATH

by THOMAS M. DISCH

A single mote of red dust drifted down upon the sampler-to-be, and Old Sally Ivanov blew it away with a single imprecation of one syllable. The older women of the Mars colonies used such words as freely as their men, but eight-year-old Ilisiveta was more offended than words could tell. More, anyhow, than she was willing for *her* words to tell. The proprieties evolve swiftly at the frontier, and the second and third generations, not having occasion to match the strength of the first pioneers, exceed them in virtue. Ilisiveta made a mental note to tell her mother that Grandmother had used "that word" again and returned to the task at hand — a Pennsylvania Dutch apron upon which she was tatting a number of square orange flowers.

She was bored, oh *how* she was bored! It was Sunday afternoon, the very dullest hour of the dullest day of the week, and Ilisiveta couldn't even suit-up

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for an hour's play out-of-locks because of the tempest — the tempest!

Her grandmother was bent over the utility table, squinting at a piece of nylon on which she was tracing free-hand, a Moorish arabesque from a photostat made at the Jefferson Library. The red shadows of the dust storm formed their own more masterful arabesques upon the white field of the cloth, as the squalls of grit continued to beat against the dome of Nevsky Colony. It had been going on like this for three days now.

"Close the wall, Ilisa," the old woman commanded.

Ilisiveta rose and went to the power panel recessed in the short hallway (which at night converted into her own bedroom) and flicked on the Wall-South switch. The Nightlight knob above, controlling intensity and tone, was preset to her grandmother's preference: White, Bright. Instantly the wall which the dome of the colony had been visible became opaque, and the ceiling lighted up.

"Where does all the dust come from?" Old Sally asked rhetorically. "It can't get in through the airlocks, so where does it come from?"

"People bring it in on their suits," Ilisiveta explained indulgently; but her grandmother seemed not to have heard at all. She was erasing one of the lines of the arabesque, which had swerved off un-Moorishly in order to avoid another speck of dust.

"If you used the projector, Grandmother —" Ilisiveta began.

"If I used the projector, Granddaughter, it wouldn't be handicraft."

Handicraft! Ilisiveta gave an audible sigh. Embroidery and ceramics and such were good enough for old pension-women who had done their thirty-years' service for the colony or borne six children. But was it for little girls who had four hours of homework still ahead of them on Sunday afternoon? Who would be much happier diddling with their own designs, however crude, instead of copying these dull patterns from old books? Who might have been out-of-locks playing, if it weren't for the dreary, the eternal Martian dust storm?

No, Ilisiveta concluded in silence, *it wasn't.*

"My eyes hurt. . . ." she said, laying her embroidery hoop aside.

Then, feeling that maybe this wasn't enough: "And I should do my homework."

Instead of snapping at her, Old Sally laid down her own

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hoop and came over to sit down by her granddaughter on the tuckaway. "I know how you're feeling, my dear. Even when I was a little girl and there were so many more things that had to be done, Sunday afternoons could be damn boring."

She laid her dry old hand on Ilisiveta's, and the little girl, though she loved her grandmother dearly, could not help but feel a little shiver — of what? of revulsion? dread? — at the long blue vein that snaked across the woman's rough skin.

"It wouldn't be boring if we could see a movie," Ilisiveta suggested, with, it seemed to her, Machiavellian slyness.

"What movie would you like to see, darling?"

"Oh, *you* know . . ."

The old woman's face clouded over. "Oh, Ilisiveta, you've seen that one a hundred times. You don't want to see it again."

"I do! Oh, Grandma, *please?*"

"Very well then, but you'll have to set up the projector and run it yourself."

"I don't know how!"

"Then it's time you learned."

Sally spent ten minutes supervising the operation that would have taken herself two to perform. A large plastic tile was removed from the floor, and the storage file (which the Ivanovs shared with the family on the level below) rose to the full height of the ceiling — some five and a half feet — with a pretty mechanical purr. Ilisiveta took out the movie projector from the bottom of the file and carried it to the utility table. She rummaged through the box of microfilm for the cylinder coded H-1998 (the number stood for the year it had been printed) and stuck this into the appropriate slot in the machine. It threaded itself. A light indicated that it was ready to project.

Only then did Ilisiveta recall that the screen had gone down the chute last week to Repairs and hadn't yet returned, but she solved this problem without even a word to her grandmother. Taken out of its hoop and affixed to the wall with magnetic clasps, Sally's sampler-to-be made a perfectly satisfactory screen. She adjusted the Night-light to Dimmest, Gray. There only remained for her or press the green button on the projector.

Ilisiveta wasn't really interested in the first three minutes of the movie. There was only the ship, looking like any other ship (if anything it was rather old fashioned), and the approach to the planet, which, though inherently dramatic, could be seen in more spectacu-

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lar versions at school or even at home on the teevee.

Then, suddenly, *he* was there — Ilisiveta's grandfather, Dmitri Alexeyitch Ivanov, dead these many years but here now, smiling, young, and tanned. In a close-up shot, Dmitri Alexeyitch Ivanov waved his hand at the camera, and in the background a palm tree rustled its peculiar leaves in the wind.

A *palm* tree! What a beautiful strange thing that was. There were, of course, no palm trees on Mars, and the sight of it here had all the mythic fascination for Ilisiveta that a tapestry of unicorns would have had for a girl of antiquity.

For a precious moment the camera in the hands of the amateur cameraman (Sally, most likely) slipped and one could catch a glimpse of the sea (and of Dmitri's chest, peeling from sunburn). The sea was blue.

Ilisiveta pressed the red button, and the image froze on the cloth. In the brightest patches of the picture, where the sunlight glinted off the water, the incomplete arabesque on the backside of the nylon became visible, like a watermark or a message written in milk and onion juice.

"How big was the sea?" Ilisiveta asked.

"Well, my dear, you've seen the maps."

"Yes, but . . . But they're just maps."

"The sea was very big. How can I say how big? There in the Phillipines you could see as much sea as you can see of the moss-fields from Mount America." Mount America, despite its grandiloquent title, was hardly more than a hill, though by Martian standards it was a very high hill — eight hundred feet at its crest — and considered something of a scenic wonder.

"That big!"

"Bigger," Old Sally said gravely, caught up now herself in the spirit of reminisce. But her eyes were fixed not so much on the sea as on the frozen image of her husband, his stocky chest and broad chin, the one red with the sunburn he had got after only two days on Earth, the other tan with the characteristic tan of Mars. He had been only twenty-four then and but two years out of Mars medschool. He was, for both Sally and Ilisiveta, though in a different way for each, the very image of masculine perfection.

"Let's go on," Sally said. She had learned that memories are savored best when they are not lingered upon.

Ilisiveta pushed the green button, and the camera had no

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sooner righted itself than Dmitri and the palm tree vanished, and the honeymooners (for one could see at a glance that that's what they were) appeared arm-in-arm on the observation deck of the Empire State Building. Sally Ivanov's hair was fiery red instead of yellowish-gray, and a stiff wind kept whipping it into her face. Beyond them, a great dome covered the city, through which a sky of perfect blue (laced rather queerly with the traceries of an arabesque) glowed jewel-like. Mars had never witnessed a blue like the blue of that sky, and Ilisiveta, caught up in that simpler spectacle, hardly afforded a glance for the panorama of the great, jumbled city.

"You'd never believe," Sally was saying, with a touch of bitterness, "how much trouble it was getting our visas for the States. If it hadn't been for all the publicity we got in the Philippines and the other neutral countries, I'm sure they'd have never let us in. It took an act of Congress, would you believe it? And I was *born* in Oregon! But it wasn't on my account we got in, it was because of Mitya. He was the hero of the moment, you know. For discovering the serum. The newspapers and magazines had a big appetite for heroes and not too much regard for truth, so it was Mitya got all the credit. I suppose, after all, it was good that he did — otherwise, we could hardly have afforded a honeymoon *there*. The round-trip fare was some impossible amount — about a hundred thousand freemars each — more than any of us colonists could have earned in a lifetime. It was the magazine that paid it for us. We weren't supposed to smile or wave at any photographers except the three that were always with us from the magazine. But Mitya was always cheating. He'd wave at anyone." Sally laughed quietly.

On the screen, Dmitri was laughing too, even more quietly. Then he bent down to kiss his newlywed bride. No sooner had their lips parted than he swung around to face the camera, no longer smiling. Even without sound, you could tell by the parting of his lips what word he had said. If you knew such words in Russian.

"That's when they called him a name, isn't it?"

"Yes. It was a very bad name; I don't think they meant for him to hear it."

"It was because he was Russian?"

"Oh, in Russia they called us just as bad names. It wasn't because he was Russian or I was

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American — it was because we were Martians. Our revolution had only been two years before, and neither Russia or the States had recognized us officially. We were the first Free Martian citizens ever to come back to Earth. I never knew which they resented more — our being free and not caring about the Cold War — or our being a Russian and an American married to each other."

The next few scenes passed without commentary from Sally: the Statue of Liberty, decrepit, its torch-bearing arm fallen away; the storefronts of Fifth Avenue as the Ivanovs whizzed along on the central 5 mph pedestrian ramp; the antique, antiseptic beauty of Kennedy Airport.

Then came the brief sequence along the Pennsylvania turnpike: the jeering, gesticulating crowds, the posters of COMMY GO HOME. In Moscow there had been almost identical crowds and almost identical posters (with YANK instead of COMMY), but by then the Ivanovs were hoarding their film for the nicer things. There, now, was the close-up of the woman who had tried to hit Sally with the WHY - DON'T - YOU - BACK WHERE-YOU-CAME - FROM poster. Ordinarily that woman would have been thought rather pretty, but as the camera had immortalized her she was monstrous. Ilisiveta knew this woman very well, for she had returned to her often in nightmares, and she closed her eyes until she was sure that the monster would be gone.

When she opened them, the room had become absolutely dark. The projector was dead, and the Dimmest, Gray light in the ceiling was extinguished as well. The air was tense with a terrible sound, the sound of silence.

"The Converters," Ilisiveta whispered, and in the same instant the emergency units came on. The air circulators circulated air again, and a dim light began flashing the emergency signal overhead. The doors whooshed open so that nobody might be trapped inside in the event (and this was quite unthinkable) the emergency units should also go out.

"It's the tempest," Sally said. "It's put a big drain on the power."

Ilisiveta was very excited (there had been only one failure before in her whole life) and she wanted to rush out into the corridors of Level H (the Ivanovs, being a prominent family, lived near the surface and enjoyed an authentic, not a televised, view of the dome) where

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she might relish the disaster more fully. But she knew it would not do to leave her grandmother alone at such a time, and then, before she could invent any sort of excuse, the main Converters turned on again, and the crisis was over.

On the nylon screen the nightmarish face of the woman from Pennsylvania vanished behind the blue uniform of a policeman.

Old Sally ordered the projector to be turned off. Like most of the colonists over fifty (and Sally was thirty years past fifty), she had a bad heart. Though having lasted this long, it couldn't be thought as bad as all that. Nevertheless she needed a moment of calm after such a fright as this.

The Converters were the very lifeblood, the heartbeat, as it were, of the Nevsky Colony and all the other colonies of Mars or anywhere—Titan, Ganymede, Venus, Eros. It was the converters that had made the establishment of the colonies, and later their independence, possible, for it gave them an almost inexhaustible source of power. With 98 per cent efficiency, a converter could transform matter, any scrap of waste, into electrical energy. Here they provided power enough to grow vast hydroponic cultures, mine the meager deposits from the Martian hills, and to manufacture whatever was absolutely necessary and a few things that were only nice.

They were wonderful machines, and Sally, like every colonist, was grateful to them; but it *was* galling to think that your life was so entirely dependent on their smooth operation and that without them there would not even be air to breathe, or heat, or life.

After her two tranquilizers had taken hold, however, Sally seemed agreeable to let the movie show go on. It would indeed have been a great cruelty to have brought it to a halt just then, for the next sequence, photographed at the Bolshoi, was the chief reason Ilisiveta had wanted to watch the old movie still once more. It was a dream as sweet as the preceding nightmare had been bitter.

From out a glade of unreal trees three women advanced in dresses. They drifted like the mist, touching only the tips of their toes to the floor, lifting now those slim legs as easily as one would draw a breath of air. They drifted so in a wide circle and then they disappeared. A single woman stepped from behind the largest of the unreal trees. Her arms floated languidly, like the arms of a person

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(though Ilisiveta had never seen such a thing) a person totally enveloped in water. But what her movements most suggested (and Ilisiveta could not have been expected to know this) was a swan.

The little girl sighed. "It looks so easy. I wish . . ."

"Don't be deceived by looks, Ilisa. The man who took us there, Ambassador Barnum I think his name was, he explained that those girls start learning to dance like that when they're no older than you, and they study every day for ten years before they can do some of those things right. Even then it's only a few who are good enough to go on stage. He said their feet would be bloody from walking on their toes that way, and they could never eat the things they liked. It was harder than being in the Army. Harder than being on Mars almost."

"But, still I wish — "

"There's no use making wishes like that, Ilisa," Sally said in her sternest tone. And yet, she thought to herself, why, if not for the very same reason, the quest of this illusive Terran beauty, did she herself continue her copying, her embroideries, her castings? She so seldom met with a success, and yet these vanities had robbed the utilitarian side of things (to which side she had devoted the best and major part of her life and strength) of all its attractiveness for her. She lusted for the ineluctable.

And now it seemed that she —or the film, which Ilisiveta must have seen on the average of once a month — had communicated that same insatiable appetite to her granddaughter — and that simply would not *do*. If an old woman chose to waste the rest of a useless life on nostalgic trifles, that was one thing; it was quite another when eight-year-old Ilisiveta spent hours alone in the bathroom trying to stand on her toes like the ballerinas of the Bolshoi Ballet. Someday, perhaps, there would be room on Mars for theaters and artists and room in the colonists' lives for the more arduous forms of leisure. But it wouldn't be in Ilisiveta's day, and the sooner she learned that lesson the better.

They saw the rest of the film through in silence: the storm over the Caspian; Bernini's colonnade in front of St. Peter's (they hadn't been allowed to take a movie of their audience with John XXVII); the Helicopter ride above the Alhambra.

There were a dozen more glimpses of Dmitri and Sally Ivanov, a waving hand, a smile.

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a dress whipping about in the wind. Ilisiveta had seen these scenes innumerable times, and yet now they occasioned a strange new thought, a question that was really beyond her years to ask or answer: was the beautiful woman in that movie, radiant with health and happiness, the same person as eighty-year-old Sally Ivanov? Was *that* Ilisiveta's grandmother? There was nothing in the body or the face of that decrepit woman that indicated a kinship.

And yet, later that night, after her parents had come home from their jobs and she was lying in her bed in the hallway, listening (as usual, after a bad dust storm) to her grandmother coughing in the bathroom, it seemed to Ilisiveta that perhaps they *were* one and the same person, continuous from then to now, and that she had only been able to see the transitional Sally Ivanovs, the mother, the widow, the hospital matron, the *grande dame,* instead of only the extreme ends the red and violet, of the spectrum of her womanhood, then she would have been able to recognize the bride that still lived on beyond the body's and time's betrayal. This effort of empathy was for Ilisiveta a triumphant achievement of imagination, but like most triumphs it was quickly dissipated. No sooner had the old woman herself emerged from the tiny watercloset into the hallway than the whole structure came tumbling down under the sheer weight of the actual aged flesh. Ilisiveta's grandmother could be nobody else but Ilisiveta's grandmother.

"Have I been keeping you awake with my coughing?"

"Oh no. I've been keeping myself awake."

"With thoughts of what, my dear?" Smiling, for she supposed the girl was recalling that glimpse of Tatianova, and now it did not seem so terrible a thing for her to have daydreams of being a ballerina.

"... Nothing. Of nothing."

The old woman rested a hand on the Wall-South switch. "Do you mind — just for a minute?" Ilisiveta said nothing, and Sally turned the switch to Off. Immediately the living-room wall became transparent.

"Thank heaven," the old woman whispered.

The dust storm was over. Both of them were quiet in view of the spectacle of the Martian night-sky, intense with stars, perhaps the most awesome sight on that planet.

"There's Cancer," Ilisiveta said, pointing, "and there's Leo the Lion, and there's — "

"Earth," said the old woman.

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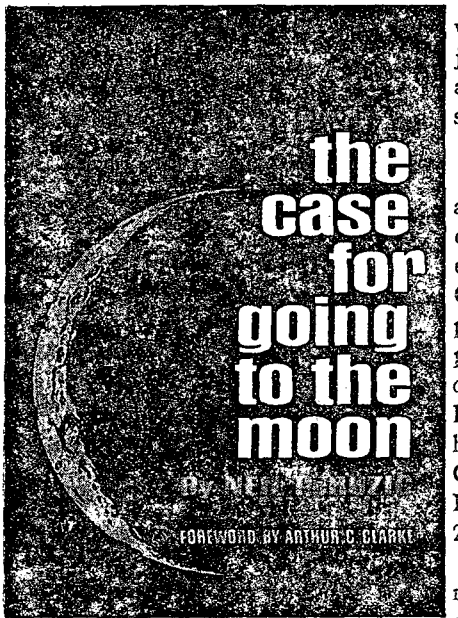

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"Earth? Where?" Ilisiveta wondered if maybe this were a joke. It didn't *sound* like a joke, and her grandmother wasn't smiling.

She was, in fact, crying.

Earth was, at the very best, a swirl of dust in the emptiness of space, invisible from Mars even to astronomers. The very Converters that had made life possible here and on the other planets had made it impossible on Earth. Indeed, they had made Earth impossible. In a war that had lasted some few seconds, the Converters had simply converted Earth into pure energy— with a 2 per cent residue of dust.

Old Sally Ivanov made no reply to her granddaughter's question. It became rather . . . well, uncomfortable being there in the room with her— the oldest woman on Mars and the last person anywhere who had ever seen and touched and smelt and actually walked on the planet on which the human race had originated and on which, so nearly, it had perished.

In her own inept and eight-year-old way, Ilisiveta did the best she could to comfort the old woman.

"But, Grandmother," she said, "there *is* no Earth."

— THOMAS M. DISCH

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Where the Changed Ones Go

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

The Planet Venus hated human beings. To survive, a human had to become something else!

I

The Venusian boy danced nimbly around the patch of Trouble Fungus behind the chapel, avoiding the gray-green killer with practice ease. He hop-skipped past the rubbery bole of the Limblime Tree and approached the serried row of jagged nameless stalks that lined the back garden. The boy grinned at them, and they parted for him as obligingly as the Red Sea had yielded to Moses some time earlier.

"Here I am," he said to Nicholas Martell.

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"I didn't think you'd be back," the Vorster missionary said.

The boy — Elwhit — looked mischievous. "Brother Christopher said I couldn't come back. That's why I'm here. Tell me about the Blue Fire. Can you really make atoms give light?"

"Come inside," Martell said.

The boy represented his first triumph since coming to Venus, and a small triumph it was, so far. But Martell did not object to that. A step was a step. There was a planet to win, here.

Inside the chapel the boy hung back, suddenly shy. He was no more than ten, Martell guessed. Was it just wickedness that had made him come here? Or was he a spy from the chapel of heretics down the road? No matter. Martell would treat him as a potential convert.

He activated the altar and the Blue Fire welled into the small room, colors dancing against the boards of the groined wooden ceiling. Power surged from the cobalt cube, and the harmless, dramatic radiations wrung a gasp of awe from Elwhit.

"The fire is symbolic," Martell murmured. "There's an underlying oneness in the universe — the common building-blocks, do you see? Do you know what atomic particles are? Protons, electrons, neutrons? The things everything's made up of?"

"I can touch them," Elwhit said. "I can push them around."

"Will you show me how?" Martell was remembering the way the boy had parted those knifeblade-sharp plants in back. A glance, a mental shove, and they had yielded. These Venusians could teleport, he was sure of it. "How do you push things?" Martell asked. But the boy shrugged the question aside.

"Tell me more about the Blue Fire," he said.

"Have you read the book I gave you? The one by Vorst? That tells you all you need to know."

"Brother Christopher took it away from me."

"You showed it to him?" Martell said, startled.

"He wanted to know why I came to you. I said you talked to me and gave me a book. He took the book. I came back. Tell me why you're here. Tell me what you teach."

Martell hadn't imagined that his first convert would be a child. He said carefully, "The religion we have here is very much like the one that Brother Christopher teaches. But there are some differences. His people make up a lot of stories. They're good stories, but they're only stories."

"About Lazarus, you mean?"

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"That's right. Myths, nothing more. We try not to need such things. We're trying to get right in touch with the basics of the universe. We — "

The boy lost interest. He tugged at his tunic and nudged at a chair. The altar was what fascinated him, nothing else. The glistening eyes roved toward it.

Martell said, "The cobalt is radioactive. It's a source of betas — electrons. They're going through the tank and knocking photons loose. That's where the light comes from."

"I can stop the light," the boy said. "Will you be angry if I stop it?"

It was a kind of sacrilege. Martell knew. But he suspected that he would be forgiven. Any evidence of teleporting activity that he could gather was useful.

"Go ahead," he said.

The boy remained motionless. But the radiance dimmed. It was as if an invisible hand reached into the reactor, intercepting the darting particles. Telekinesis on the subatomic level! Martell was elated and chilled all at once watching the light fade. Suddenly it flared more brightly again. Beads of sweat glistened on the boy's bluish-purple forehead.

"That is all," Elwhit announced.

"How do you do it?"

"I reach." He laughed. "You can't?"

"Afraid not," Martell said. "Listen, if I give you another book to read, will you promise not to show it to Brother Christopher? I don't have many. I can't afford to have the Harmonists confiscate them all."

"Next time," the boy said. "I don't feel like reading things now. I'll come again. You tell me all about it some other time."

He danced away, out of the chapel, and went skipping through the underbrush, heedless of the perils that lurked in the deep-shadowed forest beyond. Martell watched him go, not knowing whether he was actually making his first convert or whether he was being mocked.

Perhaps both, the missionary thought.

Nicholas Martell had come to Venus ten days before, aboard a passenger ship from Mars. He had been one of thirty passengers aboard the ship, but none of the others had cared for Nicholas Martell's company. Ten of them were Martians, who did not care to share the atmosphere Martell breathed. Martians, now that their planet had been cozily terraformed, preferred to fill their lungs with an Earthside mix of gases. So had Martell, once, for he was a na-

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tive Earthman himself. But now he was one of the changed ones, equipped with gills in good Venusian fashion.

Not gills, truly: they would serve no function under water. They were high-density filters, to strain the molecules of decent oxygen from the Venusian air. Martell was well adapted. His metabolism had no use for helium or the other inerts, but it could draw sustenance from nitrogen, and had no real objections to fueling on CO_2 for short spells. The surgeons at Santa Fe had worked on him for six months.

It was forty years too late to make adjustments on Martell-ovum or Martell-fetus, as was the normal practice in fitting a man for life on Venus, so they had done their work on Martell the man. The blood that flowed in his veins was no longer red. His skin had a fine cyanotic flush. He was as a Venusian born.

There had been nineteen Venusians of the true blood aboard the ship, too. But they felt no kinship for Martell, and had forced him to withdraw from their presence. The crewmen had set up Martell's cradle in a storage chamber, with gentle apologies: "You know those Venusians, Brother. Give them the wrong kind of look and they're at you with their daggers.

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You'll stay here. You'll be safer here." A thin laugh. "You'll be even safer, Brother, if you head for home without ever setting foot on Venus."

Martell had smiled. He was prepared to let Venus do its worst.

Venus had martyred several dozen members of Martell's religious order in the past forty years. He was a Vorster, or, more formally a member of the Brotherhood of the Immanent Radiance, and he had attached himself to the missionary wing.

Unlike his martyred predecessors, Martell was surgically adapted to live on Venus. The others had had to muffle themselves in breathing-suits, and perhaps that had limited their effectiveness. The Vorsters had made no headway on Venus at all, though they were the dominant religious group on Earth, and had been for more than a generation. Martell, alone and adapted, had taken upon himself the long-delayed task of founding a Venusian order of the Brotherhood.

Venus had given Martell a chilly welcome. He had blanked out in the turbulence of the landing, as the ship plunged through the cloud layer. Then he had recovered and sat up, a

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thin man with a wedge-shaped face and pale, hooded eyes. Through the port he had his first glimpse of Venus: a flat, muddy-looking field, stretching perhaps half a mile, with trunked ugly trees whose massed bluish leaves had a sinister glint. The sky was gray, and swirling clumps of low-lying clouds formed whorling patterns against the deeper background. Robot technicians were bustling from a squat, alien-looking buildng to service the ship.

In the landing station, a low-caste Venusian stared at the Vorster with blank indifference, taking his passport and saying coolly "Religious?"

"That's right."

"How'd you get in?"

"Treaty of 2128," Martell said. "A limited quota of Earthside observers for scientific, ethical or — "

"Spare me." The Venusian pressed his fingertip to a page of the passport and a visa stamp appeared, glowing brilliantly. "Nicholas Martell. You'll die here, Martell. Why don't you go back where you came from? Men live forever there, don't they?"

"They live a long time. But I have work here."

"Fool!"

"Perhaps," Martell agreed calmly. "May I go?"

"Where are you staying? We have no hotels here."

"The Martian Embassy will look after me until I'm established."

"You'll never be established," the Venusian said.

Martell did not contradict him. He knew that even a low-caste Venusian regarded himself as superior to an Earthman, and that a contradiction might seem a mortal insult. Martell was not equipped for dagger-dueling. And, since he was not a proud man by nature, he was willing to swallow any manner of abuse for the sake of his mission.

The passport man waved him on. Martell gathered up his single suit case and passed out of the building.

A taxi, now, he thought. It was many miles to town. He needed to rest, and to confer with the Martian Ambassador, Weiner. The Martians were not particularly sympathetic to his aims, but at least they were willing to countenance Martell's presence here. There was no Earth Embassy, not even a consulate. The links between the mother planet and her proud colony had been broken long ago.

Taxis waited at the far side of the field. Martell started across. The ground crunched be-

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neath his feet, as though it were only a brittle crust. The planet looked gloomy. Not a hint of sun came through those clouds. His adapted body was functioning well, though.

Hardly anyone but robots seemed to be about at the spaceport. Venus was a sparsely populated planet, with hardly more than three million people in its seven widely spaced towns. The Venusians were frontiersmen, legendary for their haughtiness. They had room to be haughty, Martell thought. Let them spend a week on teeming Earth and they might change their ways.

"Taxi!" Martell called.

None of the robocars budged from their line. Were even the robots haughty here, he wondered? Or was there something wrong with his accent? He called again, getting no response.

Then he understood. The Venusian passengers were emerging and crossing to the taxi zone. And, naturally, they had precedence.

Martell watched them. They were high-caste men, unlike the passport man. They walked with an arrogant swaggering gait, and Martell knew they would slash him to his knees if he crossed their path.

He felt a bit of contempt for them. What were they, anyway, but blue-skinned samurai, border lairds after their proper time, childlike self-appointed princelings living a medieval fantasy? Men who were sure of themselves did not need to swagger, nor to surround themselves with elaborate codes of chivalry.

But yet they *were* impressive as they paraded across the field. More than custom separated the high-caste and the low-caste Venusians. They were biologically different.

The high-caste ones were the first comers, the founding families of the Venus colony, and they were far more alien in body and mind than Venusians of more recent vintage. The early genetic processes had been unsubtle. The first colonists had been transformed virtually into monsters. Close to eight feet tall, with giant pores, and pendulous red gill-bunches at their throats, they were alien beings who gave little sign that they were the great - great - grandchildren of Earthmen.

Later in the process of colonizing Venus, it had become possible to adapt men for the second planet without varying nearly so much from the basic human model. Both strains of Venusians, since they arose from manipulation of the germ plasm, bred true; both shared the same exaggerated sense of honor and both were now alien strains, in-

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wardly and outwardly, in mind and in body. But those whose ancestry went back to the most changed of the changed ones were in charge, making a virtue of their strangeness and the planet was their private playground.

Martell watched as the high caste ones drove off. No taxis remained. The ten Martian passengers of the ship were getting into a cab on the other side of the depot. Martell returned to the building. The lowcaste Venusian glowered at him.

Martell said, "When will I be able to get a taxi to take me to town?"

"You won't. They aren't coming back today."

"I want to call the Martian Embassy, then. They'll send a car for me."

"Are you sure they will? Why should they bother?"

"Perhaps so!" Martell said evenly. "I'd better walk."

The look he got from the Venusian was worth the gesture. The man stared in surprise and shock. And possibly, admiration, mingled somewhat with patronizing confidence that Martell must be a madman. Martell left the station. He began to walk, following the narrow ribbon of a road, letting the unearthly atmosphere soak deep into his altered body.

II

It was a lonely walk. Not a sign of habitation broke the belt of vegetation on either side of the highway, nor did any vehicles pass him. The trees, somber and eerie with their bluish cast, towered over the road. Their knifeblade-like leaves glimmered in the faint diffused light. There was an occasional rustling sound in the woods, as of beasts crashing through the thickets.

Martell's mind hummed with plans.

He would establish a small chapel and let it be known what the Brotherhood had to offer: life eternal and the key to the stars. The Venusians might threaten to kill him, as they had killed previous missionaries of the Brotherhood, but Martell was prepared to die, if necessary, that others might have the stars. His faith was strong.

Before his departure, the high ones of the Brotherhood had personally wished him well: grizzled Reynolds Kirby, the Hemispheric Coordinator, had grasped his hand, and then had come an even greater surprise as Noel Vorst himself, the Founder, a legendary figure more than a century old, had come forth to tell him in a soft, feathery voice, "I know that

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your mission will bear fruit, Brother Martell."

Martell still tingled with the memory of that glorious moment.

Now he strode forward, buoyed by the sight of a few habitations set back from the road. He was at the outskirts, then. On this pioneer world, pioneer habits held true, and the colonists did not build their homes close together. They spread sparsely over a radiating area surrounding the main administrative centers. The man-high walls enclosing the first houses he saw did not surprise him; these Venusians were a surly lot, who would build a wall around their entire planet, if they could. But soon he would be in town, and then —

Martell came to a halt as he saw the Wheel hurtling toward him.

His first thought was that it had broken free from some vehicle. Then he realized what it was: no fragment of machinery, but Venusian wildlife.

It surged over a crest in the road, a hundred yards in front of him, and came plunging wildly toward him at about ninety miles an hour. Martell had a clear though momentary glimpse: two wheels of some horny substance, mottled orange and yellow, linked by a box-like inner structure. The wheels were nine feet across, at least; the connecting structure was smaller, so that wheel-rims projected around it. Those rims were razor-sharp. The creature moved by ceaselessly transferring its weight within that central housing, developing terrific momentum.

Martell leaped back. The Wheel hurtled past him, missing his toes by inches. Martell saw the sharpness of the rim and felt an acrid odor sting his nostrils. If he had been a bit slower, the Wheel would have sliced him in two.

It traveled a hundred yards beyond him. Then, like a gyroscope running amok, it executed a turn in an astonishingly narrow radius and came shooting back toward Martell.

The thing's hunting me, he thought!

He knew many Vorster combat techniques, but none of them were designed to cope with a beast like this. All he could do was keep side stepping and hope that the Wheel could not make sudden compensations in its course. It drew near; Martell sucked in his breath and leaped back once again.

This time the Wheel swerved ever so slightly. Its leading left-hand edge sliced through the

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trailing end of Martell's blue cloak, and a ribbon of cloth fluttered to the pavement. Panting, Martell watched the thing swing round for another try, and knew that it could indeed correct its course. A few more passes and it would split him.

The Wheel came a third time.

Martell waited as long as he dared. With the outer blades only a few feet away, he broad-jumped — into the path of the creature.

Earthborn muscles carried him twenty feet in the light gravity. He more than half expected to be bisected in mid-jump, but when his feet touched ground he was still in one piece.

Whirling, Martell saw that he had surprised the beast. It had turned inward, toward the place where it had expected him to be, and had passed through his suitcase. The suitcase had been sliced as though by a laser beam. His belongings were scattered on the road. The Wheel, halting once more, was coming back.

What now? Climb a tree? The nearest one was void of limbs for the first twenty feet. Martell could not shinny to safety in time. All he could do was keep hopping from side to side in the road, trying to outguess the creature. He knew that he could not keep that up much longer. He would tire, and the Wheel would not, and the slashing rims would pass through him and spill his altered guts on the pavement.

The Wheel came. Martell sidestepped it again and heard it whistle past. Was it getting angry? No, it was just an insensate brute looking for a meal, hunting in the manner some perverse nature had designed for it. Martell gasped for breath. On the next pass —

Suddenly he was not alone. A boy appeared, running out from one of the stockaded buildings at the crest of the hill, and trotted alongside the Wheel for a few paces.

Then — Martell did not see how it was done — the Wheel went awry and toppled, landing on one disk with the other in the air. It lay there like a huge cheese blocking the road. The boy, who could not have been much more than ten, stood by it, looking pleased with himself.

He was low-caste, of course. A high-caste one would not have bothered to save him. Martell realized that probably the low-caste boy had had no interest in saving him either, but simply had knocked the Wheel over for the sport of it.

Martell said, "I offer thanks, friend. Another moment and I'd have been cut to ribbons."

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The boy made no reply. Martell came closer to inspect the fallen Wheel. Its upper rim was straining to right itself, clearly an impossible task. Martell looked down, saw a dark violet cyst near the center of one wheel writhe and open.

"Look out!" the boy cried, but it was much too late.

Two whip-like threads burst from the cyst. One wrapped itself around Martell's left thigh, the other around the boy's waist. Martell felt a blaze of pain, as though the threads were lined with acid-edged suckers. A mouth opened on the inner surface of the Wheel. Martell saw milling, grinding tooth-like projections beginning to churn in anticipation.

But this was a situation he could handle. He had no way of stopping the headlong plunge of the Wheel, for that was mere mechanical energy at work; but presumably the creature's brain carried an electrical charge, and the Vorsters had ways of altering current flows in the brain. It was a mild form of esping, within the threshold of nearly anyone who cared to master the disciplines involved.

Ignoring the pain, Martell seized the tightening thread with his right hand and performed the act of neutralization. A moment later the thread went slack and Martell was free. So was the boy. The threads did not return to the cyst, but remained lying limp in the roadway. The milling teeth became still; the rippling horny plate of the upper wheel subsided. The thing was dead. Martell glanced at the boy.

"Fair enough," he said. "I've saved you and you've saved me. So now we're even."

"The debit is still yours," replied the boy with strange solemnity. "If I had not rescued you first, you never would have lived to rescue me. And it would not have been necessary to rescue me, anyway, since I would not have come out onto the road, and therefore — "

Martell's eyes widened. "Who taught you to reason like that?" he asked in amusement. "You sound like a theology professor."

"I am Brother Christopher's pupil."

"And he is — ?"

"You'll find out. He wants to see you. He sent me out here to fetch you."

"And where will I find him?"

"Come with me."

Martell followed the boy toward one of the buildings. They left the dead Wheel in the road. Martell wondered what would happen if a carload of high-caste came along and had

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to shove the carcass out of the way with their own aristocratic hands.

They passed through a burnished coppery gate that slid open at the boy's approach. Martell found himself approaching a simple wooden A-frame building. When he saw the sign mounted above the door, he was so amazed that he release his grip on his sundered suitcase, and for the second time in ten minutes his belongings went spilling to the ground.

The sign said:

SHRINE OF THE
TRANSCENDENT
HARMONY
ALL ARE WELCOME

Martell's knees felt watery. Harmonists? *Here?*

The green-robed Harmonists were heretics, offshoots of the original Vorster movement. They had made some progress on Earth for a while, and had even seemed to threaten the parent organization, but for more than twenty years now they had been nothing but an absurd little splinter group of no significance. It was inconceivable that these heretics, who had failed so utterly on Earth, could have established a church here on Venus, something that the Vorsters themselves had been unable to do. It was impossible.

A figure appeared in the doorway — a stocky man in early middle age, about sixty or so, his hair beginning to gray, his features thickening. Like Martell, he had been surgically adapted to Venusian conditions. He looked calm and self-assured. His hands rested lightly on a comfortable priestly paunch.

He said, "I'm Christopher Mondschein. I heard of your arrival, Brother Martell. Won't you come in?"

Martell hesitated.

Mondschein smiled. "Come, come, Brother. There's no peril in breaking bread with a Harmonist, is there? You'd be mincemeat now but for the lad's bravery. And I sent him to save you; you owe me the courtesy of a visit. Come in. Come in. I won't meddle with your soul, Brother. That's a promise."

III

The Harmonist place was unassuming but obviously permanent. There was a shrine, festooned with the statuettes and claptrap of the heresy, and a library, and dwelling-quarters. Martell caught sight of several Venusian-bodies at work in the rear of the building, digging what might be the foundations of an extension.

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Martell followed the older man into the library. A familiar row of books caught his eye: the works of Noel Vorst, handsomely bound, the expensive Founder's Edition.

Mondschein said, "Are you surprised? Don't forget that we accept the supremacy of Vorst too, even if he spurns us. Sit down. Wine? They make a fine dry white here."

"What are you doing here?" Martell asked.

"Me? That's a terribly long story, and not entirely creditable to me. The essence of it is that I was a young fool and let myself get maneuvered into being sent here. That was forty years ago and I've stopped resenting what happened by now. It was the finest thing that could have happened to me in my life, I've come to realize, and I suppose it's a mark of maturity that I was able to see — "

Mondschein's garrulity irritated Martell. He cut in: "I don't want your personal history, Brother Mondschein. I meant, how long has your order been here?"

"Close to fifty years."

"Uninterruptedly?"

"Yes. We have eight shrines here and about four thousand communicants, all of them low-caste. The high-casters don't deign to notice us."

"They don't deign to wipe you out, either," Martell observed.

"True," said Mondschein. "Perhaps we're beneath their contempt."

"But they've killed every Vorster missionary that's ever come here," Martell said. "Us they devour, you they tolerate. Why is that?"

"Perhaps they see a strength in us that they don't find in the parent organization," suggested the heretic. "They admire strength, of course. You must know that, or you'd never have tried to walk from the landing station. You were demonstrating your strength under stress. But of course it would rather have spoiled your demonstration if that Wheel had slashed you to death."

"As it very nearly did."

"As it certainly would have done," said Mondschein, "if I had not happened to notice your predicament. That would have terminated your mission here rather prematurely. Do you like the wine?"

Martell had barely tasted it.

"It's not bad. Tell me, Mondschein, have they really let themselves be converted here?"

"A few. A few."

"Hard to believe. What do you people know that we don't?"

"It isn't what we know."

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Mondschein said. "It's what we have to offer. Come with me into the chapel."

"I'd rather not."

"Please. It won't give you a disease."

Reluctantly Martell allowed himself to be led into the sanctum sanctorum.

He looked around with distaste at the ikons, the images, and all the rest of the Harmonist rubbish. At the altar, where a Vorster chapel would have had the tiny reactor emitting blue Cerenkov radiation, there was mounted a gleaming atom-symbol model along which electron-simulacra pulsed in blinding, ceaseless motion. Martell did not think of himself as a bigoted man, but he was loyal to his faith, and the sight of all this childish paraphernalia sickened him.

Mondschein said, "Noel Vorst's the most brilliant man of our times, and his accomplishments mustn't be underrated. He saw the culture of Earth fragmented and decadent, saw people everywhere escaping into drug addictions and Nothing Chambers and a hundred other deplorable things. And he saw that the old religions had lost their grip, that the time was ripe for an eclectic, synthetic new creed that dispensed with the mysticism of the former religions and replaced it with a new kind of mysticism. A scientific mysticism. That Blue Fire of his! A wonderful symbol, something to capture the imagination and dazzle the eye. As good as the Cross and the Crescent — even better because it was modern, it was scientific, it could be comprehended even while it bewildered. Vorst had the insight to establish his cult and the administrative ability to put it across. But his thinking was incomplete."

"That's a lofty dismissal, isn't it? When you consider that we control Earth in a way that no single religious movement of the past has ever — "

Mondschein smiled. "The achievement on Earth is very imposing, I agree. Earth was ready for Vorst's doctrines. But why did he fail on the other planets, though? Because his thinking was too advanced. He didn't offer anything that colonists could surrender their hearts and souls to."

"He offers physical immortality in the present body," Martell said crisply. "Isn't that enough?"

"No. He doesn't offer a mythos. Just a cold quid-pro-quo, come to the chapel and pay your tithe and you can live forever, maybe. It's a secular religion, despite all the litanies and rit-

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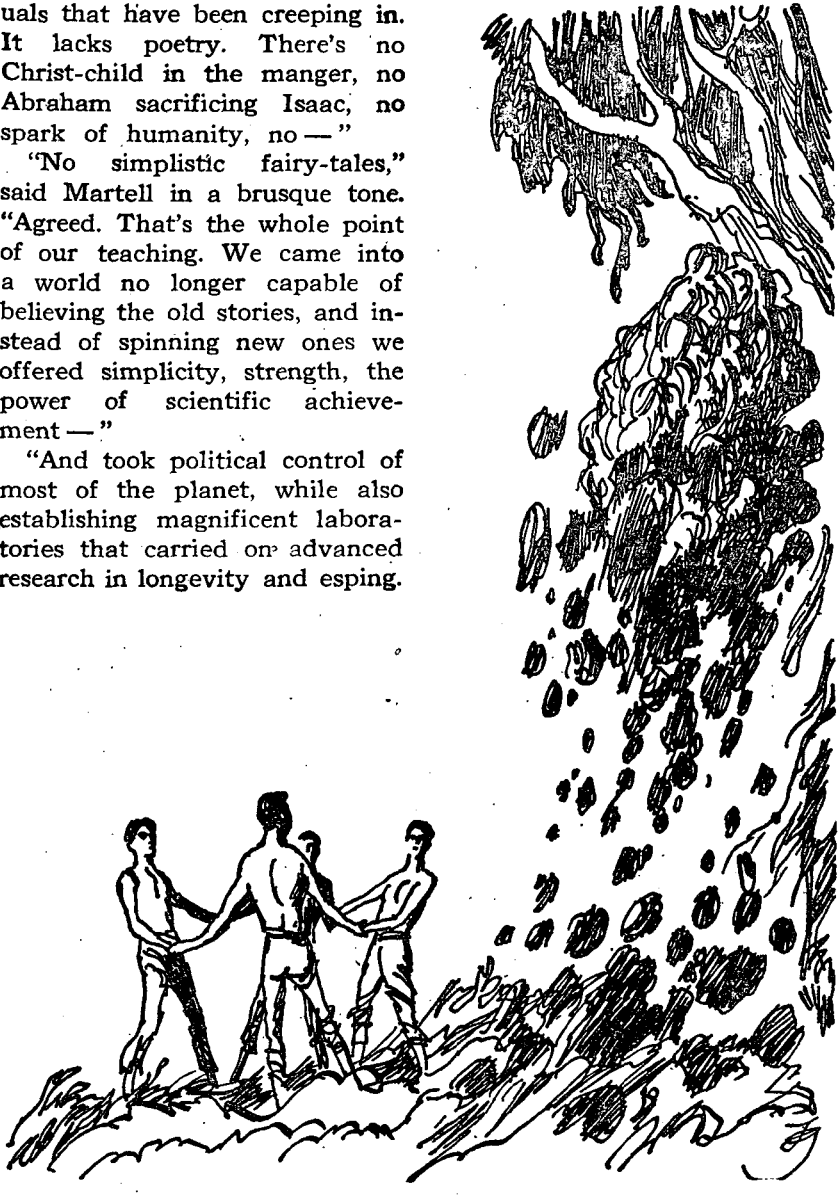
uals that have been creeping in. It lacks poetry. There's no Christ-child in the manger, no Abraham sacrificing Isaac, no spark of humanity, no — "

"No simplistic fairy-tales," said Martell in a brusque tone. "Agreed. That's the whole point of our teaching. We came into a world no longer capable of believing the old stories, and instead of spinning new ones we offered simplicity, strength, the power of scientific achievement — "

"And took political control of most of the planet, while also establishing magnificent laboratories that carried on advanced research in longevity and esping.



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Fine. Fine. Admirable. But you failed here. We are succeeding. We have a story to tell, the story of Noel Vorst, the First Immortal, his redemption in the atomic fire, his awakening from sin. We offer our people a chance to be redeemed in Vorst and in the later prophet of Transcendent Harmony, David Lazarus. What we have is something that captures the fancy of the low-casters, and in another generation we'll have the high-casters too. These are pioneers, Brother Martell. They've cut all ties with Earth and they're starting over on their own, in a society just a few generations old. They need myths. They're shaping myths of their own here. Don't you think that in another century the first colonists of Venus will be regarded as supernatural beings, Martell? *Don't you think that they'll be Harmonist saints by then?*"

Martell was genuinely startled. "Is that your game?"

"Part of it."

"All you're doing is returning to fifth-century Christianity."

"Not exactly. We're continuing the scientific work, too."

"And you believe your own teachings?" Martell asked.

Mondschein smiled strangely. "When I was young," he said, "I was a Vorster acolyte, at the Nyack chapel. I went into the Brotherhood because it was a job. I needed a structure for my life, and I had a wild hope of being sent out to Sante Fe to become a subject in the immortality experiments, and so I enrolled. For the most unworthy of motives. Do you know, Martell, that I didn't feel a shred of a religious calling? Not even the Vorster stuff — stripped down, secular — could get to me. Through a series of confusions that I still don't fully understand, and that I won't even begin to explain to you, I left the Brotherhood and joined the Harmonist heresy and came here as a missionary. The most successful missionary ever sent to Venus, as it happens. Do you think the Harmonist mythologies can move me if I was too rational to accept Vorster thinking?"

"So you're completely cynical in handing out this nonsense about saints and images. You do it for the sake of preserving your power. A peddler of nostrums, a quack preacher in the back woods of Venus — "

"Easy," Mondschein warned. "I'm getting results. And, as I think Noel Vorst himself might tell you, we deal in ends, not in means. Would you like to kneel here and pray a while?"

"Of course not."

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"May I pray for you, then?"

"You just told me you don't elieve your own creed."

Smiling, Mondschein said, Even the prayers of an unbeever may be heard. Who nows? Only one thing is cerain: you'll die here, Martell. So 'll pray for you, that you may ass through the purifying flame f the higher frequencies."

"Spare me. Why are you so ure I'll die here? It's a fallacy o assume that simply because ll previous Vorster missionares have been martyred here, I'll e martyred too."

"Our own position is uneasy nough here. Yours will be impossible. Venus doesn't want ou. Shall I tell you the only vay you'll possibly live more han a month here?"

"Do."

"Join us."

"Don't be absurd. Do you eally think I'd do that."

"It isn't beyond possibility. Many men have left your order for mine — myself included."

"I prefer martyrdom."

"In what way will that benefit anybody? Be reasonable, Brother. Venus is a fascinating place. Wouldn't you like to live to see a little of it? Join us. You'll learn the rituals soon enough. You'll see that we aren't such ogres."

"Thank you," said Martell. "Will you excuse me now?"

"I had hoped you would be our guest for dinner."

"That won't be possible. I'm expected at the Martian Embassy, if I don't meet any more local beasts in the road."

Mondschein looked unruffled by Martell's rejection of his offer — an offer that could not have been made, Martell thought, with any great seriousness. The older man said gravely, "Allow me at least to offer you transportation to town. Surely your pride in your own sanctity will permit you to accept that."

Martell smiled. "Gladly. It'll make a good story to tell Coordinator Kirby — how the heretics saved my life and gave me a ride into town."

"After making an attempt to seduce you from your faith."

"Naturally. May I leave?"

"It'll be a few moments until I can arrange for the car. Would you like to wait outside?"

Martell bowed and made a grateful escape from the heretical chapel. Passing through the yard, a cleared space some fifty feet square bordered by scaly, grayish-green shrubbery whose thick-petalled black flowers had an oddly carnivorous look.

Four Venusian boys, including Martell's rescuer, were at

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work on an excavation. They were using manual tools, shovels and picks, which gave Martell the uncomfortable sensation of having slid back into the nineteenth century. Earth's gaudy array of gadgetry, so conspicuous and so familiar, could not be found here.

The boys glared coldly at him and went on with their work. Martell watched.

They were lean and supple, and he guessed that their ages ranged from about nine to fourteen, though it was hard to tell. They looked alike enough to be brothers. Their movements were graceful, almost elegant. and their bluish skins gleamed lightly with perspiration. It seemed to Martell that the bony structure of their bodies was even more alien than he had thought; they did improbable things with their joints as they worked.

Abruptly, they tossed their picks and shovels aside and joined hands. The bright eyes closed a moment. Martell saw the loose dirt rise from the excavation pit and collect itself in a neat mound some twenty feet behind it.

They're pushers, Martell thought in wonder. *Look at them!*

Brother Mondschein appeared at that precise moment. "The car is waiting, Brother," he s smoothly.

IV

As he entered the Venusi city, Martell could not ta his mind from the casual fe of the four boys. They h scooped a few hundred poun of loose soil from a pit, usi esp abilities, and had smug deposited it just where th wanted it to go.

Pushers! Martell tremble with barely suppressed excit ment. The espers of Earth we a numerous tribe, now, b their talents were mainly tel pathic, not extending in the d rection of telekinesis to any si nificant degree. Nor could tl development of the powers l controlled. A program scheduled breeding, now in i fourth or fifth generation, w intensifying the existing es powers. A gifted esper coul reach into a man's mind an rearrange its contents, or prob for the deepest secrets. Thei were a few precogs, too, wh ranged up and down the tim sequence as though all point along it were one point. But the usually burned out in adoles cence, and their genes were los to the pool. Pushers — teleport — who could move physical ob jects from place to place — wer

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as rare as phoenixes on Earth.

And here were four of them in a Harmonist chapel's back yard on Venus.

New tensions quivered in Martell. He had made two unexpected discoveries on his first day: the presence of Harmonists on Venus, and the presence of pushers among the Harmonists. His mission had suddenly taken on devastating new urgency. It was no longer merely a matter of gaining a foothold on an unfriendly world. It was a matter of being outstripped and surpassed by a heresy thought to be in decline.

The car Mondschein had provided dropped Martell off at the Martian Embassy, a blocky little plaza that seemed to be the entire town. The Martians breathed Earth-type air, and they did not care to adapt themselves to Venusian conditions. Once he entered the building, therefore, Martell had to accept a breathing-hood that would protect him against the atmosphere of the planet of his birth.

The Ambassador was Freeman Nat Weiner. He was about twice Martell's age, perhaps even older — close to ninety, even. His frame was powerful, with shoulders so wide they seemed out of proportion to his hips and legs.

Weiner said, "So you're here. I really thought you had more sense."

"We're determined people, Freeman Weiner."

"So I know. I've been studying your ways for a long time." Weiner's eyes became remote. "More than sixty years, in fact. I knew your Coordinator Kirby before his conversion, did he ever tell you that?"

"He didn't mention it," Martell said. His flesh crept. Kirby had joined the Vorster Brotherhood about twenty years before Martell had been born.

To live a century was nothing unusual these days. Vorst himself was surely into his thirteenth or fourteenth decade. But it was chilling all the same to think of such a span of years.

Weiner smiled. "I came to Earth to negotiate a trade deal, and Kirby was my chaperone. He was with the U.N. then. I gave him a hard time. I was a drinker, then. Somehow I don't think he'll ever forget that night." His gaze riveted on Martell's unblinking eyes. "I want you to know, Brother, that I can't provide any protection for you if you're attacked. My responsibility extends only to Martian nationals."

"I understand."

"My advice is the same as it's been from the start. Go back to

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Earth and live to a ripe old age."

"I can't do that, Freeman Weiner. I've come with a mission to accomplish."

"Ah, dedication! Wonderful! Where will you build your chapel?"

"On the road leading to town. Perhaps closer to town than the Harmonist place."

"And where will you stay until it's built?"

"I'll sleep in the open."

"There's a bird here," Weiner said. "They call it a shrike. It's as big as a dog, and its wings look like old leather, and it has a beak like a spear. I once saw it dive from five hundred feet at a man taking a nap in an open field. The beak pinned him to the ground."

Unperturbed, Martell said, "I survived an encounter with a Wheel today. Perhaps I can dodge a shrike too. I don't intend to be frightened away."

Weiner nodded. "I wish you luck," he said.

V

Luck was about all Martell was going to get from the Ambassador, but he was grateful even for that. The Martians were cool toward Earth and all it produced, including its religions. They did not actually hate Earthmen, as the Venusians of both castes appeared to do; the Martians were still Earthlike themselves, and not changed creatures whose bond with the mother world was tenuous at best. But the Martians were tough, aggressive frontiersmen who looked out only for themselves. They served as go-betweens for Earth and Venus because there was profit in it; they accepted missionaries from Earth because there was no harm in it.

Martell left the Martian Embassy and set about his tasks.

He had money and he had energy. He could not hire Venusian labor directly, because it would be an act of pollution for a Venusian even of the low caste to work for an Earthman, but it was possible to commission workmen through Weiner. The Martians, naturally, received a fee for serving as agents.

Workmen were hired and a modest chapel was erected. Martell set up his pocket-sized reactor and readied it for use. Alone in the chapel, he stood in silence as the Blue Fire flickered into glowing life.

Martell had not lost his capacity for awe. He was a worldly man, no mystic; yet the sight of the radiation streaming from the water-shielded reactor worked its magic on him, and he dropped to his knees, touching

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his forehead in the gesture of submission. He could not carry his religious feeling to the stage of idolatry, as the Harmonists did, but he was not without a sense of the might of the movement to which he had pledged his life.

The first day, Martell simply carried out the ceremonies of dedication. On the second and third and fourth, he waited hopefully for some low-caster who might be curious enough to enter the chapel. None came.

Martell did not care to seek worshippers, not just yet. He preferred that his converts be voluntary, if possible. The chapel remained empty. On the fifth day, it was entered — but only by a frog-like creature ten inches long, armed with wicked little horns on its forehead and delicate, deadly-looking spines that sprouted from its shoulders. Were there no life-forms on this planet that went without armor or weaponry, Martell wondered? He shooed the frog out. It growled at him and lunged at his foot with its horns. Martell drew his foot back barely in time, interposing a chair. The frog stabbed at the wood, sank inch-deep with the left horn; when it withdrew, an iridescent fluid trickled down the leg of the chair, burning a pathway through the wood. Martell had never been attacked by a frog before. On the second try, he got the animal out the door without suffering harm. A pretty planet, he thought.

The next day came a more cheering visitor: the boy Elwhit. Martell recognized him as one of the boys who had been teleporting dirt behind the Harmonist place. He appeared from nowhere and said to Martell, "You've got Trouble Fungus out there."

"Is that bad?"

"It kills people. Eats them. Don't step in it. Are you really a religious?"

"I like to think so."

"Brother Christopher says you shouldn't be trusted, that you're a heretic. What's a heretic?"

"A heretic is a man who disagrees with another man's religion," Martell said. "I happen to think Brother Christopher's the heretic, as a matter of fact. Would you like to come inside?"

The boy was wide-eyed, endlessly curious, restless. Martell longed to question him about his apparent telekinetic powers, but he knew it was more important at the moment to snare him as a convert. Questions at this point might only frighten him away. Patiently Martell explained what the Vorsters had to offer.

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It was hard to gauge the boy's reaction. Did abstract concepts mean anything to a ten-year-old? Martell gave him Vorst's book, the simple text. The boy promised to come back.

"Watch out for the Trouble Fungus," he said as he left.

A few days passed. Then the boy returned, with the news that Mondschein had confiscated his book.

Martell was pleased at that, in a way. It was a sign of panic among the Harmonists. Let them turn Vorster teachings into something forbidden, and he'd win all of Mondschein's four thousand converts away.

Two days after Elwhit's second visit, Martell had a different caller, a broad-faced man in Harmonist robes. Without introducing himself he said, "You're trying to steal that boy, Martell. Don't do it."

"He came of his own free will."

"The child has curiosity. But he's the one who'll suffer if you keep allowing him to come here. Turn him away the next time, Martell. For his own sake."

"I'm trying to take him away from you for his own sake," the Vorster replied quietly.

"You'll destroy him," said the Harmonist. "Turn him away."

Martell did not intend to yield. Elwhit was his opening wedge into Venus, and it would be madness to turn him away.

Later that same day there came another visitor, no friendlier than the horned frog. He was a burly Venusian of the lower caste, with armpit-daggers bristling on both sides of his chest. He had not come to worship. He pointed to the reactor and said, "Shut that thing off and dispose of the fissionables within ten hours."

Martell frowned. "It's necessary to our religious observance."

"It's fissionables. Not allowed to run a private reactor here."

"There was no objection at customs," Martell pointed out. "I declared the cobalt-60 for what it was and explained the purpose. It was allowed through."

"Customs is customs. You're in town now. I say no fissionables. You need a permit to do what you're doing."

"Where do I get a permit?" asked Martell mildly.

"From the police. I'm the police. Request denied. Shut that thing off."

"And if I don't?"

For an instant Martell thought the self-styled policeman would stab him on the spot. The man drew back as though Martell had spat in his face. After an ugly

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silence he said, "Is that a challenge?"

"It's a question."

"I ask you on my authority to get rid of that reactor. If you defy my authority you're challenging me. Clear? You don't look like a fighting man. Be smart and do as I say."

He went out.

Martell shook his head sadly. Law enforcement a matter of personal pride? Well, it was only to be expected. More to the point: they wanted his reactor off, and without the reactor his chapel would not be a chapel. Could he appeal? To whom? If he dueled with the intruder and slew him, would that give him the right to run the reactor? He could hardly take such a step anyway.

Martell decided not to give up without a struggle. He sought the authorities, or what passed for authorities here, and after spending four hours waiting to be admitted to the office of a minor official he was told clearly and coldly to dismantle his reactor at once. His protests were dismissed.

Weiner was no help either. "Shut the reactor down," the Martian advised.

"I can't function without it," said Martell. "Where'd they get this law about private operations of reactors?"

"They probably invented it to take care of you," Weiner suggested amiably. "There's no help for it, Brother. You'll have to shut down."

Martell returned to the chapel. He found Elwhit waiting on the steps. The boy looked disturbed.

"Don't close," he said.

"I won't." Martell beckoned him inside. "Help me, Elwhit. Teach me. I need to know."

"What?"

"How do you move things around with your mind?"

"I reach into them," the boy said. "I catch hold of what's inside. There's a strength. It's hard to say."

"Is it something you were taught to do?"

"It's like walking. What makes your legs move? What makes them stand up underneath you?"

Martell simmered with frustration. "Can you tell me what it feels like?"

"Warm. On top of my head. I don't know. I don't feel much. Tell me about the electron, Brother Nicholas. Sing the song of photons to me."

"In a moment," Martell said. He crouched down to get on the boy's eye-level. "Can your mother and father move things?"

"A little. I can move them more."

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"When did you find out you could do it?"

"The first time I did it."

"And you don't know how you—" Martell paused. What was the use? Could a ten-year-old boy find words to describe a telekinetic function? He did it as naturally as he breathed. The thing to do was to ship him to Earth, to Santa Fe, and let the Noel Vorst Center for the Biological Sciences have a look at him. Obviously that was impossible. The boy would never go, and it would hardly be proper to spirit him away.

"Sing me the song," Elwhit prodded.

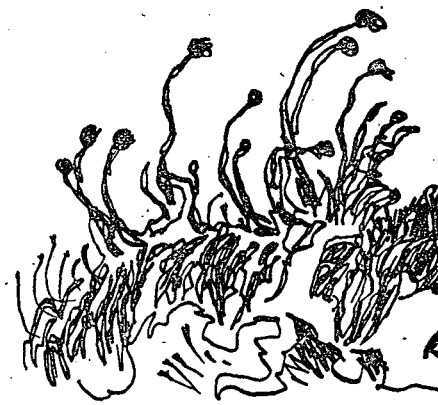
"*In the strength of the spectrum, the quantum, and the holy angstrom* — "

The chapel door flew open and three Venusians entered: the police chief and two deputies. The boy pivoted instantly and skittered past them, out the back way.

"Get him!" the police chief roared.

Martell shouted a protest. It was useless. The two deputies pounded after the boy, into the yard. Martell and the police chief followed.

The deputies closed in on the boy. Abruptly, the meatier one was flipping through the air, legs kicking violently as he headed for the deadly patch of Trou-



ble Fungus in the underbrush.

He landed hard. There was a muffled groan. Trouble Fungus, Martell had learned by watching it, moved quickly. The carnivorous mold would devour anything organic; its sticky filaments, triggering with awesome speed, went to work instantly. The deputy was trapped in a network of loops whose adhesive enzymes immediately began to operate. Struggling only made it worse. The man thrashed and tugged, but the loops multiplied, stapling him to the ground. And now the digestive enzymes were coming into play.

A sweet, sickly odor rose from the Trouble Fungus clump.

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Martell had no time to study the process of dissolution. The man caught in his fatal collars of slime was close to death, and the surviving deputy, his face almost black with fear and rage, had drawn a knife on the boy.

Elwhit knocked it out of his hand. He tried to gather strength for another cast into the fungus patch, but his face was sweat-speckled, and bunching muscles in his cheeks told of the inward struggle. The deputy rocked and swayed, resisting the telekinesis. Martell stood frozen. The police chief bounded forward, knife on high.

"*Elwhit!*" Martell screamed. Even a telekinetic has no way of defending himself against a stab in the back. The blade went deep. The boy dropped. In the same moment, with the pressure withdrawn, the deputy slipped and fell on his face. The chief seized the wounded, convulsing boy and hurled him into the Trouble Fungus. He landed beside the soft mass of the dead deputy, and Martell watched in horror as the sinister loops locked into place. Sickness assailed him. He ran halfway through the disciplinary techniques before his mind would work properly again.

By then, the police chief and his deputy had recovered

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their calmness. With scarcely a look at the two dissolving corpses, they seized Martell and hauled him back into the chapel.

"You killed a boy," Martell said, breaking loose. "Stabbed him in the back. Where's your honor?"

"I'll settle that before our court, priest. The boy was a murderer. And under the spell of dangerous doctrines. He knew we were closing you down. It was a violation to be here. Why isn't that reactor off?"

Martell groped for words. He wanted to say that he did not intend to accept defeat, that he was staying on here, determined to fight even to the point of martyrdom despite their order that he shut up shop. But the brutal killing of his only convert had smashed his will.

"I'll shut the reactor down," he said hollowly.

"Go and do it."

Martell dismantled it. They waited, exchanging pleased glances when the light flickered out. The deputy said, "It isn't a real chapel without the light burning, is it, priest?"

"No," Martel replied. "I'm closing the chapel too, I guess."

"Didn't last long."

"No."

The chief said, "Look at him with his gills flapping. All tricked out to look like one of us, and who's he fooling? We'll teach him."

They moved in on him. They were burly, powerful men. Martell was unarmed, but he had no fear of them. He could defend himself. They neared him, two nightmare figures, grotesquely inhuman, their eyes bright and slitted, inner lids sliding tensely up and down, small nostrils flickering, gills atremble. Martell had to force himself to remember that he was a monster as much as they; he was a changed one now. Their brother.

"Let's give him a farewell party," the deputy said.

"You've made your point," said Martell. "I'm closing the chapel. Do you need to attack me, too? What are you afraid of? Are ideas that dangerous to you?"

A fist crashed into the pit of his stomach. Martell swayed, caught his breath, forced himself to remain cool. The edge of a hand chopped at his throat. Martell slapped at it, deflected it and seized the wrist.

There was a momentary exchange of ions and the deputy fell back, cursing.

"Look out! He's electric!"

"I mean no harm," said Martell mildly. "Let me go in peace."

Hands went to daggers. Martell waited.

The Venusians dropped back,

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apparently willing to let the matter end here. They had, after all, succeeded in throttling the Vorster mission. Now they appeared to have qualms about dealing with the defeated missionary.

"Get yourself out of town, Earthman," the police chief grumbled. "Go where you belong. Don't come mucking around here with your phony religion. We aren't buying any."

VI

There was no blackness quite like the black of the night sky of Venus, Martell thought. It was like a layer of wool swathing the vault of the heavens. Not a hint of a star, not a flicker of a moonbeam, cut through that arch of darkness overhead. Yet there was light, occasional and intermittent: great predatory birds, hellishly luminous, skewered the darkness at unpredictable moments.

Standing on the rear veranda of the Harmonist chapel, Martell watched a glowing creature soar past no higher than a hundred feet up. It was near enough for Martell to see the row of hooked claws that studded the leading edges of the curved, back-swept wings.

"Our birds have teeth as well," said Christopher Mondschein.

"And the frogs have horns," Martell remarked. "Why is this planet so vicious?"

Mondschein chuckled. "Ask Darwin, my friend. It just happened that way. You've met our frogs, then? Deadly little beasts. And you've seen a Wheel. We have amusing fish, too. And carnivorous fungi. But we are without insects. Can you imagine that? No land arthropods at all. Of course, there are some delightful ones in the sea — a kind of scorpion bigger than a man, a sort of lobster with disturbingly large claws — but no one goes into the sea, here."

"I understand why," Martell said. Another luminescent bird swooped down, skimmed the trees, and rocketed away. From its flat head jutted a glowing fleshy organ the size of a melon, wobbling on a thick stem.

Mondschein said, "You wish to join us after all?"

"That's right."

"Infiltrating, Martell? Spying?"

Color came to Martell's cheeks. The surgeons had left him with the flush reaction, although he turned a dull gray when affected now. "Why do you accuse me?" he asked.

"Why else would you want to join us? You were haughty about it last week."

"That was last week. My chap-

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el is closed. I saw a boy who trusted me killed before my eyes. I have no wish to see more such murders."

"So you admit that you were guilty in his death?"

"I admit that I allowed him to jeopardize his life," Martell said.

"We warned you of it."

"But I had no idea of the cruelty of the forces that would strike at me. Now I do. I can't stand alone. Let me join you, Mondschein."

"Too transparent, Martell. You came here bristling with the urge to be a martyr. You gave up too soon. Obviously you want to spy on our movement. Conversions are never that simple, and you're not an easily swayed man. I suspect you, Brother."

"Are you esping me?"

"Me? I don't have a shred of ability. Not a shred. But I have common sense. I know a bit about spying, too. You're here to sniff."

Martell studied a gleaming bird high against the dark backdrop. "You refuse to accept me, then?"

"You can have shelter for the night. In the morning you'll have to go. Sorry, Martell."

No amount of persuasion would alter the Harmonist's decision. Martell was not surprised, nor greatly distressed; joining the Harmonists had been a strategy of doubtful success, and he had more than half expected Mondschein to reject him. Perhaps if he had waited six months before applying.

He remained aloof while the little group of Harmonists performed evening vespers. They were not called "vespers," of course, but Martell could not avoid identifying the heretics with the older religion. Three altered Earthmen were stationed at the mission, and the voices of the two subordinates joined with Mondschein's in hymns that seemed offensive in their religiosity and yet faintly moving at the same time. Seven low-caste Venusians took part in the service. Afterward, Martell shared a dinner of unknown meat and acrid wine with the three Harmonists. They seemed comfortable enough in his presence, almost smug. One, Bradlaugh, was slim and fragile-looking, with elongated arms and comically blunt features. The other, Lazarus, was robust and athletic, his eyes oddly blank, his skin stretched mask-tight over his broad face. He was the one who had visited Martell's ill-fated chapel. Martell suspected that Lazarus was an esper.

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"Are you related to *the* Lazarus?" Martell asked.

"His grand-nephew. I never knew the man."

"No one seems to have known him," said Martell. "It often occurs to me that the esteemed founder of your heresy may have been a myth."

Faces stiffened around the table. Mondschein said, "I met him once, a few weeks after I changed from a blue tunic to a green one. He came to see me as I was about to undergo surgery to fit me for Venus. An impressive man, he was: tall and commanding, with an air of majesty."

"Like Vorst," Martell said.

"Very much like Vorst. Natural leaders, both of them."

Martell said, "Vorst came to *me*. Just before *my* operation. It seems to be the custom."

"A reassuring custom," said Mondschein. He rose. "Brothers, good night."

Martell was left alone with Bradlaugh and Lazarus. An uncomfortable silence followed; after a while Bradlaugh said stiffly, "I'll show you to your room."

The room was small, with a simple cot. Martell was content. Fewer religious symbols decorated the room than there might have been, and it was a place to sleep. He took care of his devotions quickly and closed his eyes. After a while, sleep came — a thin crust of slumber over an abyss of turmoil.

The crust was pierced.

There came the sound of laughter, booming and harsh. Something thumped against the chapel walls. Martell struggled to wakefulness in time to hear a thick voice cry, "Give us the Vorster!"

He sat up. Someone entered his room: Mondschein, he realized. "They're drunk," the Harmonist whispered. "They've been roistering all over the countryside all night, and now they're here to make trouble."

"The Vorster!" came a roar from outside.

Martell peered through his window. At first he saw nothing: then, by the gleam of the light-cells studding the chapel's outer walls, he picked out seven or eight titanic figures, striding unsteadily back and forth in the courtyard.

"High-casters!" Martell gasped.

"One of our espers brought the word an hour ago," said Mondschein. "It was bound to happen sooner or later. I'll go out and calm them."

"They'll kill you."

"It's not me they're after," said Mondschein, and left.

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Martell saw him emerge from the building. He was dwarfed by the ring of drunken Venusians, and from the way they closed in on him, Martell was certain that they would do him some harm.

But they hesitated. Mondschein faced them squarely. At this distance, Martell could not hear what they were saying. A parley of some sort, perhaps. The big men were armed and reeling. Some glowing creature shot past the knot of figures, giving Martell a sudden glimpse of the faces of the high-caste men: alien, distorted, terrifying. Their cheekbones were like knifeblades; their eyes mere slits. Mondschein, his back to the window now, was gesticulating, no doubt talking rapidly and earnestly.

One of the Venusians scooped up a twenty-pound boulder and lobbed it against the mission's whitewashed wall. Martell nibbled a knuckle. Fragments of conversation came to him, ugly words: "Let us have him . . . we could take you all . . . time we crushed all you toads . . ."

Mondschein's hands were upraised, now. Imploringly, Martell wondered, or was he simply trying to keep the Venusians at bay?

Martell thought of praying. But it seemed a hollow, futile gesture. One did not pray for direct reward, in the Brotherhood. One lived well, and served the cause, and reward came. Martell slipped into his robe and went outside.

Never before had he been this close to a group of high-casters. There was a rank odor about them, an odor that reminded Martell of the scent of the Wheel.

"What do they want?" Martell asked.

Mondschein gaped at him. "Go back inside! I'm negotiating with them!"

One of the Venusians unfurled a sword. He drove it a foot into the spongy earth, leaned on it and said, "There's the priestling now! What are we waiting for?"

Mondschein said helplessly to Martell, "You shouldn't have come out. There might have been a chance to quiet them."

"They'll destroy your whole mission here if I don't pacify them. I've got no right to bring that on you."

"You're our guest," Mondschein reminded him.

Martell did not care to accept the charity of heretics. He had come to the Harmonists, as they had guessed, in the hope of spying; that had failed, as had the rest of his mission here, and he would not hide behind Mondschein's green robe. He caught

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the older man's arm and said, "Go inside. Fast!"

Mondschein shrugged and disappeared. Martell swung round to face the Venusians.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

A gob of spittle caught him in the face. Without speaking directly to him, one Venusian said, "We'll skewer him and throw him in Ludlow Pond, eh?"

"Hack him! Spit him!"

"Stake him out for a Wheel!"

Martell said, "I came here in peace. I bring you the gift of life. Why won't you listen? What are you afraid of?" They were big children, he saw, revelling in their power to crush an ant. "Let's all sit down by that tree. Allow me to talk to you for a while. I'll take the drunkenness out of you. If you'll only give me your hand — "

"Watch out!" a Venusian roared. "He stings!"

Martell reached for the nearest of the giants. The man leaped back with a most ungallant display of edginess. An instant later, as though to atone for bolting that way, his sword was out, a glittering anachronism nearly as long as Martell itself. Two Venusians drew their daggers. They strutted forward, and Martell filled his altered lungs with alien air and waited for the shedding of his no-longer red blood, and then suddenly he was no longer there.

"How did you get here?" Ambassador Nat Weiner asked.

"I wish I knew," said Martell.

The sudden brightness of the Martian's office stabbed at Martell's eyes. He still could see the descending blades of the fearsome swords, and he was rocked by a sensation of unreality, as though he had left one dream to enter another in which he was dreaming yet a different thread.

"This is a maximum-security building," said Weiner. "You have no right to be here."

"I have no right even to be alive," replied the missionary flatly.

VII

Broodingly, Martell considered retreating to Earth to tell Santa Fe what he knew.

He could go to the Vorst Center, where, less than a year ago, he had gone into a room as an Earthman, to be turned by whirling knives and lashing lasers into an alien thing. He could request an interview with Reynolds Kirby, and let that grizzled, thin-lipped centenarian know that the Venusians had telekinesis, that they could deflect a Wheel or throw an at-

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tacker into Trouble Fungus or speed a living human figure safely across five miles and pass him through walls.

Santa Fe would have to know.

The situation looked bad. Harmonists snugly established on Venus, and the place chock full of teleports — it could mean a disastrous blow to Vorst's master plan. Of course, the Vorsters on Earth had made great gains too. They were masters of the planet. Their laboratories had run simulated lifespans that showed a tally of three to four hundred years, without organ replacement — simple regeneration from within, amounting to a kind of immortality. But immortality was only one Vorster goal. The other was transport to the unreachable stars.

And there the Harmonists had their big lead. They had teleports who already could work miracles. Given a few generations of genetic work, they might be sending expeditions to other solar systems. Once you could move a man five miles in safety, it was only a quantitative jump, not qualitative, to get him to Procyon.

Martell had to tell them. Santa Fe called to him — that vast sprawl of buildings where technicians split genes and laboriously pasted them back together, where esper families submitted to an endless round of tests, where bionics men performed wonders beyond comprehension.

But he did not go.

A personal report seemed unnecessary. A message cube would do just as well. Earth now was an alien world to Martell, and he was uneasy about returning to it, living in breathing-suits. He balked at making the return journey.

Through the good offices of Nat Weiner, Martell recorded a cube and had it shipped to Kirby at Santa Fe. He remained at the Martian Embassy while waiting for his reply. He had set forth the situation on Venus as he understood it, expressing his great fear that the Harmonists have the stars.

In time Kirby's reply arrived. He thanked Martell for his invaluable data. And he expressed a calming note: the Harmonists, he said, were men. If they were to reach the stars, it would be a human achievement. Not theirs, not ours, but everyone's, for the way would be opened. Did Brother Martell follow that reasoning, Kirby asked?

Martell felt quicksand beneath him. What was Kirby saying? Means and ends were hopelessly jumbled. Was the purpose of the order fulfilled if heretics conquered the universe? In distress, he stood before the im-

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provised altar in the room Weiner had given him, seeking answers to unaskable questions.

A few days later he returned to the Harmonists.

Martell stood with Christopher Mondschein by the edge of a sparkling lake. Through the clouds came the dull glow of the masked sun, imparting a faint gleam to the water-that-was-not-water.

It was not that trickle of sunlight that made the water sparkle, though. It teemed with luminous coelenterates that lined its shallow bottom. Their tentacles, waving in the currents, emitted a gentle greenish radiance.

There were other creatures in the lake, too. Martell saw them gliding beneath the surface, ribbed and bony, with gnashing jaws and metallic fins. Now and then a snout split the water and a slim, ugly creature whipped twenty yards through the air before subsiding. From the depths came writhing sucker-tipped tendrils that belonged to monsters Martell did not care to know.

Mondschein said, "I thought I'd never see you again."

"When I went out to face the Venusians?"

"No. Afterward, when you holed up with the Martians. I thought you were making arrangements to go back to Earth. You know it's hopeless to try to plant a Vorster chapel here."

"I know," Martell said. "But I've got that boy's death on my conscience. I can't leave. I lured him into visiting me, and he died for it. He'd be alive if I had turned him away. And I'd be dead if you hadn't had one of your other little Venusians teleport me to safety."

"Elwhit was one of our finest prospects," Mondschein said sadly. "But he had this streak of wildness — the thing that brought him to us in the first place. A restless boy, he was. I wish you had left him alone."

"I did what I had to do," Martell replied. "I'm sorry it worked out so awfully."

He followed the path of a sinuous black serpent that swept from right to left across the lake. It extended telescoping arms in a sudden terrifying gesture and enveloped a low-flying bird. Martell said carefully, "I didn't come back here to spy on you. I came back here to join your order."

Mondschein's domed blue forehead wrinkled a little. "Please. We've been through all this already."

"Test me! Have one of your espers read me! I swear it, Mondschein I'm sincere."

"They've embedded a pack of

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hypnotic commands in you in Santa Fe. I know. I've been through it myself. They sent you here to be a spy, but you don't know it yourself, and if we probed you we might have trouble finding out the truth. You'll soak up all you can about us, and then you'll return to Santa Fe and they'll toss you to a debriefing esper who'll pump it all out of you. Eh?"

"No. Not at all."

"Are you sure?"

"Listen," said Martell, "I don't think they did anything to my mind in Santa Fe. I came to you because I belong on Venus. I've been changed." He held out his hands. "My skin is blue. My metabolism is a biologist's nightmare. I've got gills. I'm a Venusian, and this is where the changed ones go. But I can't be a Vorster here, because the natives won't have it. Therefore I've got to join you. Do you see?"

Mondschein nodded. "I still think you're a spy."

"I tell you — "

"Stay calm," said the Harmonist. "*Be* a spy. That's quite all right. You can stay. You can join us. You'll be our bridge, Brother. You'll be the link that will span the Vorsters and the Harmonists. Play both sides, if you like. That's exactly what we want."

Once again Martel felt the foundations giving way beneath his feet. He imagined himself in a dropshaft with the gravity field suddenly gone: falling, falling, endlessly falling.

He peered into the mild eyes of the older man and perceived that Mondschein must be in the grip of some crazy ecumenical scheme, some private fantasy that —

He said, "Are you trying to put the orders back together?"

"Not personally. It's part of the plan of Lazarus."

Martell thought Mondschein was referring to his own assistant. He said, "Is he in charge here or are you?"

Smiling, Mondschein replied, "I don't mean my Lazarus here. I mean David Lazarus, the founder of our order."

"He's dead."

"Certainly. But we still follow the course he mapped for us half a century ago. And that course envisages the eventual reuniting of the orders. It has to come, Martell. We each have something the other wants. You have Earth and immortality. We have Venus and teleportation. There's bound to be a pooling of interests, and possibly you'll be one of the men who'll help to bring it about."

"You aren't serious!"

"As serious as I know how to

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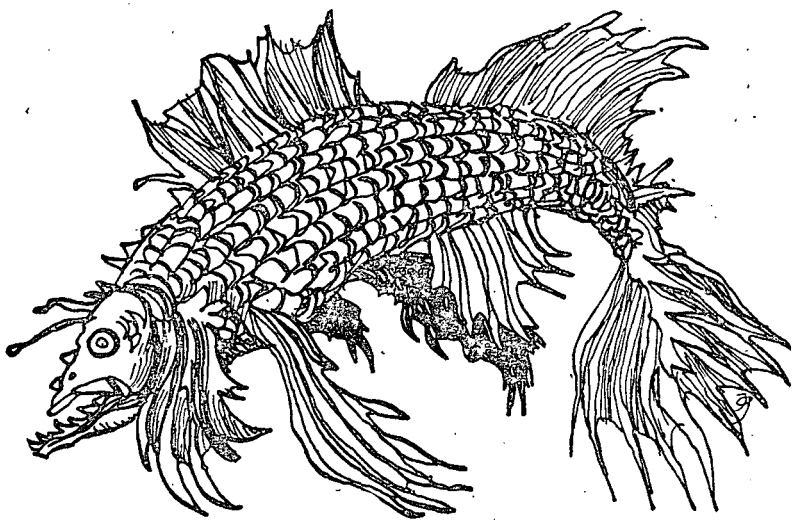

be," said Mondschein. The amiable mask dropped away. "Do you want to live forever, Martell?"

"I'm not eager to die. Except for some overriding purpose, of course."

"The translation is that you want to live as long as you can, with honor."

"Right."

"The Vorsters are getting nearer to that goal every day. We have some idea what's going on in Santa Fe. Once, about forty years ago, we stole the contents of an entire longevity lab. It helped us, but not enough. We didn't have the substratum of knowledge. On the other hand, we've made some strides too. Will it be worth a reunion, do you think? We'll have the stars — you'll have eternity. Stay here and spy, Brother. I think — and I know Lazarus thought — that the fewer secrets we have, the faster our progress will be."

Martell did not reply. A boy emerged from the woods — a Venusian boy, possibly the one who had saved him from the Wheel, perhaps the dead Elwhit's brother. They looked so interchangeable in their strangeness. Instantly Mondschein's manner changed. He donned a bland smile.

"Bring us a fish," he told the boy.

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"Yes, Brother Christopher," he said.

There was silence. Veins throbbed on the boy's forehead. In the center of the lake, the water boiled, white foam splashing upward. A creature appeared, scaly and dull gold in color. It hovered in the air, ten feet of frustrated fury, its great underslung jaw opening and closing impotently. The beast soared toward the group on the shore.

"Not that one!" Mondschein gasped.

The boy laughed. The huge fish slipped back into the lake. An instant later, something opalescent throbbed on the ground at Martell's feet, a toothy, snapping thing a foot and a half long, with fins that nearly were legs, and a fan-like tail in which wicked spikes stirred and quivered.

Martell leaped away, but he was in no danger, he realized. The fish's skull caved in as though smitten by an invisible fist, and it lay still. Martell knew terror in that moment. The slender, laughing boy, who had so mischievously pulled that monster from the waters and then this equally deadly little thing, could kill with a flicker of his frontal lobes.

Martell stared at Mondschein. "Your pushers — are they all Venusians?"

"All."

"I hope you can keep them under control!"

"I hope so too," Mondschein replied. He seized the dead fish carefully by a stubby fin, holding it so the tail-spikes pointed away from him. "A great delicacy," he said. "Once we remove the poison sacs, of course. We'll catch two or three more and have a devilfish dinner tonight to celebrate your conversion."

VIII

They gave him a room, and they gave him menial jobs to do, and in their spare time they instructed him in the tenets of Transcendent Harmony.

Martell found the room sufficient and the labor unobjectionable. It was more difficult to swallow the theology.

He could not pretend, to himself or to them, that it had any meaning for him. Warmed-over Christianity, a dollop of Islam, a tinge of latter-day Buddhism — all spread over a structure borrowed shamelessly from Vorst. It was an unpalatable mixture for Martell. There was syncretism enough in the Vorster teachings, but Martell accepted those because he had been born to them.

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They began with Vorst, accepting him as a prophet just as Christianity respected Moses and Islam honored Jesus. But, of course, there was the later dispensation, represented by the figure of David Lazarus.

Vorster writings made no mention of Lazarus. Martell knew of him only from his studies in the history of the Brotherhood of the Immanent Radiance, which mentioned Lazarus in passing as an early supporter of Vorst's and then an early dissenter.

But Vorst lived; and, so said both groups, he would live forever, in tune with the cosmos, the First Immortal. Lazarus was dead, a martyr to honesty, cruelly betrayed and slain by the domineering Vorsters in their moment of triumph on Earth.

The Book of Lazarus told the sad story:

"Lazarus was trusting and without guile. But the men whose hearts were hard came upon him and slew him in the night, and fed his body to the converter so that not even a molecule remained. And when Vorst learned of their deed, he wept and said, I wish you had slain me instead, for now you have given him an immortality he can never lose . . ."

Martell could find nothing in the Harmonist scriptures that was actually discreditable to Vorst. Even the assassination of Lazarus itself clearly was shown to be the work of underlings, carried out without Vorst's knowledge or desire. And through the writings ran an expression of hope that one day the faith would be reunited, though it was stressed that the Harmonists must submit to unity only out of a position of strength, and in complete equality.

A few months before, Martell would have regarded their pretensions as absurd. On Earth they were a pipsqueak movement, losing members from year to year.

Now, among them if not entirely of them, he saw that he had badly underestimated their power. Venus was theirs. The high-caste natives might boast and swagger, but they were no longer the masters. There were espers among the downtrodden lower caste Venusians — pushers, no less — and they had given their destinies into Harmonist hands.

Martell worked. He learned. He listened. And he feared.

The stormy season came. From the eternal clouds there burst tongues of lightning that set all Venus ablaze. Torrents of bitter rain flailed the flat plains. Trees

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five hundred feet tall were ripped from the ground and hurled great distances. From time to time, high-casters arrived at the chapel to sneer or to threaten, and in the shrieking gales they roared their blustering defiance, while within the building grinning low-caste boys waited to defend their teachers if necessary.

Once, Martell saw three high-caste men thrown twenty yards back from the entrance as they tried to break in. "A stroke of lightning," they told one another. "We're lucky to be alive."

In the spring came warmth. Stripping to his alien skin, Martell worked in the fields, Bradlaugh and Lazarus beside him. He did not yet teach at all. He was well versed by now in the Harmonist teachings, but it was all from the outside in, and a seemingly impermeable barrier of skepticism prevented it from getting deeper.

Then, on a steamy day when sweat rolled in rivers from the altered pores of the four former Earthmen at the Harmonist chapel, Brother Leon Bradlaugh joined the blessed company of martyrs. It happened swiftly. They were in the fields, and a shadow crossed above them, and a silent voice within Martell screamed, "Watch out!"

He could not move. But this was not his day to die.

Something plummeted from the sky, something heavy and leather-winged, and Martell saw a beak a yard long plunge into Bradlaugh's chest, and there was the fountaining of coppery blood. Bradlaugh lay outstretched with the shrike on him, and the great beak was withdrawn, and Martell heard a sound of rending and tearing.

They gave the last rites to what was left of Bradlaugh. Brother Christopher Mondschein presided, and called Martell to his side afterward.

"There are only three of us now," he said. "Will you teach, Brother Martell?"

"I'm not one of you."

"You wear a green tunic. You know our creed. Do you still think of yourself as a Vorster, Brother?"

"I — I don't know what I am," answered Martell. "I need to think about this."

"Give me your answer soon. There's much to be done here, Brother."

Martell did not realize that he would know within a day where he really stood. A day after Bradlaugh's funeral, the regular thrice-weekly passenger ship from Mars arrived. Martell knew nothing of it, until Mondschein came to him and said, "Take

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one of the boys in the car, and do it quickly. A man needs saving!"

Martell did not ask questions. Somehow, news had traveled down a chain of espers, and it was his task simply to obey. He entered the car. One of the little Venusian acolytes slipped in beside him.

"Which way?" Martell asked.

The boy gestured. Martell thumbed the starter. The car sped down the road, toward the airport. When they had gone two and a half miles, the boy grunted a command to halt.

A figure in a blue tunic stood by the side of the road, his back to the bole of a mighty tree. Two suitcases lay open on the highway, and a razor-backed beast with a flattened snout and boar-like tusks was rooting through them, while its mate charged the newly arrived Vorster.

The boy hopped from the car. Without sign of strain, he caused the two animals to rise and slam into trees on the far side of the road. They dropped to the ground, looking dazed but determined. The boy levitated them again and struck their heads together. When they fell this time, they swung round and fled into the underbrush.

Martell said, "Venus always seems to welcome newcomers like that. My greetings committee was a thing called a Wheel, which I hope you never meet. I'd be in ribbons now except that a Venusian boy was kind enough to teleport it over on its side. Are you a missionary?"

The man seemed too dazed to reply immediately. He knotted his hands together, released them, adjusted his tunic. Finally he said. "Yes — yes."

"Surgically changed, then?"

"That's right."

"So am I. I'm Nicholas Martell. How are things in Santa Fe, Brother?"

The newcomer's lips tightened. He was a fleshless little man, a year or two younger than Martell. He said, "How can that matter to you, if you're Martell? Martell the heretic? Martell the renegade?"

"No," Martell said. "I —"

He fell silent. His hands tensely smoothed the fabric of his Harmonist green tunic. His cheeks were burning. He realized painfully the truth about himself, that the change in him had worked inward from with out, and suddenly he could not meet the gaze of his altered successor in the Venus mission, and he turned, staring into the thicket of the no longer very alien forest.

— ROBERT SILVERBERG

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Eye of an Octopus

by LARRY NIVEN

Their job on Mars was to look for Martian remains. They had not expected to find Martians!

It was a well.

Henry Bedrosian and Christopher Luden bent over the lip, peering down into the jet darkness. Their balloon-tired motorcycle lay forgotten on the talcum sand, fine pink sand that stretched endlessly away to the flat horizon, borrowing its color from the sky. The sky was the color of blood. It might have been a flaming Kansas sunset; but the tiny sun was still at the zenith. The translucent hewn stone of the well-mouth stood like a blasphemy in the poisonous wilderness that was Mars.

It stood four feet above the sand, roughly circular, perhaps three yards across. The weathered stones were upright blocks, a foot tall by five inches wide by perhaps a foot thick. Whatever the material of those stones, they seemed to glow with a faintly blue inner light.

"It's so human!" said Henry Bedrosian. His voice held a touch of bewildered frustration, echoed by his dark, chisel-nosed face.

Chris Luden knew what he meant. "It's natural. A well's like a lever or a wheel. There aren't many changes you can make, because it's too simple. Did you notice the shape of the bricks?"

"Yes. Odd. But they could still be man-made."

"In this air? Breathing nitric oxide, drinking red fuming ni-

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tric acid? But—" Chris drew a deep breath—"why complain? It's life, Harry! We've discovered intelligent life!"

"We've got to tell Abe."

"Right."

But it was a long moment before either moved. They stood leaning over the well, vivid green pressure suits against pink sand and dark red horizon, peering down into the blur of darkness at the bottom. Then they turned to the Mars mobile.

The landing vehicle stood like an upright steel ball-point pen. Its bottom half was three spreading legs, a restarting solid rocket and a spacious cargo hold, two-thirds empty now. The upper half was the return-to-orbit stage. Far away across the crescent dunes was a white patch, the jettisoned drag chute.

The Marsmobile, a glorified two-seater motorcycle with big round tires and a number of special modifications, putt-putted up to a landing leg and stopped. Henry got off and climbed to the cabin to call Abe Cooper in the ion-driven return-to-Earth vehicle. Chris Luden mounted to the cargo hold and rummaged through a disorganized hash of necessities until he had a long coil of thin line, a metal bucket and a heavy rock hammer, all treated to resist the corrosive atmosphere. He dropped the objects net to the Marsmobile and climbed down. "Now we'll see," he told himself.

Henry descended the ladder. "Abe's having kittens," he reported. "He says if we don't call him every five minutes he'll come down after us. He wants to know, how old is the well?"

"So do I." Chris brandished the hammer. "We'll knock a chip off and analyze it. Let's go."

The well was a mile and a half from the ship, and not of a conspicuous color. Probably they would have lost it if they hadn't left a flag to mark it.

"Let's see how deep it is first," said Luden. He put the hammer in the bucket for a weight, tied a line to the handle and let it fall. In the eery silence of the Martian desert they waited.

The rope was nearly gone when the bucket struck something. In a moment the ghost of a splash came floating up from the depths. Henry marked the line so they could measure how deep it had gone. It looked about three hundred feet. They hauled it up.

The bucket was half full of a cloudy, slightly oily fluid.

Chris handed it to his partner. "Harry, you want to take this back and analyze it?"

Henry's dark face grinned

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around the pointed beard. "I'll match you for it. We both know what it's gonna be."

"Sure, but it has to be done. Even." They matched fingers. Henry lost. He rode back to the ship, the bucket dangling from the edge.

The stone which formed the well might have been quartz, or even some kind of unveined marble. It had been too badly weathered, too finely scored and polished and etched by the patient sand grains, to tell what it was. Chris Luden picked a likely looking block and brought the hammer down hard on what seemed to be a crack. He did it three times.

The hammer was ruined.

Luden shifted the hammer this way and that to examine the uneven, dulled edge and flattened corners. His blue eyes held a puzzled look. He knew the government might have quibbled about the weight of a tool for the Mars Project, but never the cost or quality. Here on Mars that hammer was worth at least a million dollars. It *must* be made of some hard, durable steel alloy. Then —

He cocked his head in his helmet, tasting a strange idea. "Harry!"

"Yeah?"

"How you doing?"

"I'm just coming in the airlock. Give me five minutes to find out that this stuff is nitric acid."

"Okay, but do me a favor. Have you got your ring?"

"The diamond horseshoe? Sure."

"Bring it back with you, outside your suit. Outside, that is."

"Now wait a minute, Chris. That's a valuable ring. Why not use your own?"

"I should have thought of that! I'll just take off my pressure suit and — Uh! Can't seem to get my helmet unfastened —"

"Stop! Stop! I get the point." There was a click as Henry's radio went off.

Luden sat down to wait.

The sun was sliding toward the horizon. They had landed shortly before sunset yesterday, so they knew how suddenly the desert could turn from pink to midnight black, and how little light the insignificant moons gave. But sundown was four hours away.

The dunes all faced the same way, perfect crescents, as regular as if hand made. Something must shape the winds here, causing them to blow always in one direction, like Earth's trade winds and the dunes would crawl across the sands, slower than snails, following the winds.

How old were the stones

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against his back? If they were really — a strange and silly thought, but Chris wouldn't have volunteered for the Mars Project if he were not half a romantic — if they were really diamond, they must be terrible old, to be worn by mere sand. Far older than the pyramids, and revered ancestor to the Sphinx. Maybe the race that carved those stones had since perished. Science fiction writers often assumed an extinct Martian race. Why, perhaps the well had originally held water —

"Hello, Chris?"

"Here."

"It's dirty nitric acid, not too strong. Next time you'll believe me."

"Harry, they didn't send us here to make astute guesses. They did all the guessing when they built the ship. We came to find out for sure, right? Right."

"See you in ten minutes."

Luden let his eyes drift back across the desert. It was a moment before he realized what had caught his eye.

One of the dunes was irregular. The curves were wrong, asymmetrical. The normal crescent had left one sprawling, trailing arm. It stood out like a pear in a line of apples.

He had ten minutes, and the dune wasn't far. Luden got up and started walking.

He stood under the dune and looked back. The well was clearly visible. The distance was even shorter than he had thought. He had been deceived by the nearness of the horizon.

The lip of the dune was some fourteen feet high.

What had distorted it? An upthrusting spire of rock, perhaps, not quite high enough to show through the sand. They could find it with the sonar later.

It had to be under the one sprawling, twisted arm of sand.

"Chris! Where the hell are you? Chris!"

Chris jumped. He'd forgotten Henry. "Look due south of the well and you'll see me."

"Why don't you stay where you're put, you idiot? I thought you'd been buried by a sandstorm."

"Sorry, Harry. I got interested in something." Chris Luden was now standing on the twisted arm of sand. He sounded preoccupied. "Try scratching the blocks of the well with your ring."

"That's an *odd* thought," Henry laughed.

"Do it."

Silence. Luden felt the wind, looked down at the sand, tried to imagine what obstruction had dropped it here. Something not necessarily very large. It would not be beneath the dune; it

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would be on the windward side . . . at the beginning of the arch . . . there.

"I scratched it, Chris. There's a scratch all right. So that effectively takes . . . ooops. Aaargh! Chris you're doomed! Only death can save you from my wrath!"

"Why are you irritated with—"

"My diamond! It's ruined!"

"Relax. You could replace it a million times over with just one block from the well."

"Say, that's true. But we'll need the laser to cut it loose. They must have used diamond dust for the cement, too. And the fuel to get it back— "

"Harry, do me a favor. Bring — "

"That last favor cost me a three thousand dollar ring!"

"Bring the Marsmobile here. I want to do some digging."

"Be right there."

A minute later Henry stopped the machine alongside Chris's green suit. His smile showed that the scratches on his ring had not permanently scarred his psyche. "Where do we dig?"

"Right where I'm standing."

The Marsmobile was equipped with two down-thrusting compressed air jets for getting over steep obstructions. A large tank under the vehicle's belly held the heavily compressed air, compressed directly from the thin Martian atmosphere by the motor. Henry turned on the jets and hovered over the spot where Chris had been standing, shifting his weight to keep the machine in place. Sand sprayed out in sheets. Chris ran to get out from under, and Henry grinned and doubled the thrust to send the fine grains showering over him.

In half a minute the pressure became too low. Henry had to land. The Marsmobile shuddered and vibrated as its motor struggled to refill the pressure chamber.

"I hate to ask," said Henry, "but what's the point of all this?"

"There's something solid down there. I want you to expose it."

"Okay, if you're sure we're in the right place. We've got six months of time to waste."

They wasted a few minutes silently watching the Marsmobile fill its pressure tank.

"Hey," said Henry. "You think we could stake a claim on this diamond mine?"

Chris Luden, sitting on the steep side of the dune, thoughtfully scratched the side of his helmet. "Why not? We haven't

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seen any live Martians, and it's for sure that nobody else has a claim. Sure we'll file our claim. The worst they can do is disallow it."

"One thing. I didn't mention it before because I wanted you to see for yourself, but the heck with it. One of those blocks is covered with deep scratches."

"They all are."

"Not like these. These are *deep,* and they're all at forty-five degree angles, unless my imagination is fooling me. They're too fine to be sure, but I think it's some kind of writing."

And without waiting for an answer, Henry took off on the air jets. He was good at it. He was like a ballet dancer. You could see Henry shifting weight, but the scooter never seemed to move.

Something was emerging from the sand.

Something not a rock.

Something like a piece of modern metal sculpture, with no use and no meaning but with a weird beauty nonetheless. Something that had been a machine and was now — nothing.

Henry Bedrosian balanced above the conical pit his jets had dug. The artifact was almost clear now. Something else showed beside it.

A mummy.

The Marsmobile settled on the last of its air. Chris plunged down the side of the pit as Henry climbed off.

The mummy was humanoid, about four feet long, with long arms, enormous fragile tapered fingers, and a traditionally oversized skull. No fine detail was visible; it had all been worn away. Chris couldn't even be sure how many fingers the—humanoid had had. One hand still held two; the other only one, plus a fattened opposable thumb. No toes showed on the feet. The thing lay face down.

The artifact, now uncovered, showed more detail. Yet the detail had no meaning. Thick bent metal bars, thin twisted wires, two enormous crumpled circles with something rotted clinging to what had been their rims — and then Henry's imagination clicked, the same visual knack that had gotten him A's in topology, and he said, "It's a bicycle."

"You've lost your mind."

"No, look. The wheels are too big, but — "

It was a fantastically distorted bicycle, with wheels eight feet across, a low dwarf-sized saddle and a system of gears to replace the chain. The gear ratio was very low. The saddle was almost against the rear wheel, and a tiller bar, now bent to scrap,

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had been fixed to the hub of the front wheel. Something had crumpled the bicycle like a crush-proof cigarette pack in a strong man's hand, and then nitric acid rust had done its worst to the metal.

"Okay, it's a bicycle," said Chris. "It's a Salvador Dali bicycle, but still a bicycle. They must have been a lot like us, hmmm? Bicycles, stone wells, writing —"

"Clothing."

"Where?"

"It must have been there. He's less worn around the torso, see? You can see the wrinkles in his skin. He must have been protected until his clothes rotted away."

"Maybe. He kind of ruins our lost race theory, doesn't he? He couldn't possibly be more than a couple of thousand years old. Hundreds would be more like it."

"Then he drank nitric acid after all! Well, that blows our diamond mine, partner. He's *got* to have living relatives," Henry said.

"We can't count on their being too much like us. These things we've found — clothing, writing, wells — they're all things any intelligent being might be forced to invent. And parallel evolution might explain the biped shape."

"Parallel evolution?" Henry repeated.

"Like the eye of an octopus. Lt's nearly identical in structure to a human eye. Yet an octopus isn't remotely human. And look at most marsupials, you can't tell them from their mammal counterparts. Well, let's try to pick him up."

Any archeologist would have shot them down in cold blood.

The mummy was as light and dry as cork, and he showed no tendency to come apart in their hands. They strapped him gently over the luggage box and climbed on themselves. Chris drove back slowly and carefully.

Chris stood on the first rung of the ladder, adjusting the mummy's balance on his left shoulder. "We'll have to spray him with plastic before takeoff," he said. "Do we have any plastic spray?"

"I don't remember any. We'd better take lots of pictures in case it does come apart."

"Right. There's a camera in the cabin." Chris started up, and Henry followed. They got the relic to the airlock without mishap.

"I've been thinking," said Henry. "That nitric acid wasn't diluted, exactly, but there was water in it. Maybe this guy's chemistry can extract the water from nitric acid."

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They put the mummy gently on a pile of blankets and began searching for the camera. After five frustrating minutes Chris deliberately banged his head against a wall. "I took it out to catch the sunset last night. It's in the cargo hold."

"So get it."

Henry stood in the airlock, watching as Chris went down the ladder. After a moment in the cargo space Chris started up with the camera strap over his shoulder.

"I've been thinking too," said Chris, his voice seemingly dissociated from his climbing figure. "Diamond can't be *that* plentiful here. And carving it into blocks must have been real hard labor. Why diamonds? And why write on a well?"

"Religious reasons? Maybe they worship water."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Of course you were. That plot's as old as Lowell."

Chris had reached the top. They squeezed into the airlock and waited for it to cycle.

The door opened. Both men had their helmets off by this time, and they both smelled it at once. Something chemical, something strong —

Thick, greasy smoke was pouring up from the ancient corpse.

Henry reacted first. He sprang for the double boiler in the small kitchen corner. The bottom half was still full of water; he snatched it up and threw the water over the smoldering Martian mummy while with his other hand he turned on the water faucet to get more.

The mummy went off like a napalm bomb.

Henry leaped away from the exploding flames and his head rammed something flat and very hard. He went down with his eyes full of leaping light.

Immediately he sat up, knowing that something urgently needed doing but unable to remember what. He saw Chris, still in vacuum suit except for the helmet, run through the multicolored flames, pick the mummy up by the ankles and throw it into the airlock. Chris hit the "Cycle" button. The inner door swung shut.

Then Chris was bending over him. "Where does it hurt, Harry? Can you talk? Can you move?"

Henry sat up again. "I'm okay."

Chris expelled a gusty breath.

Henry stood up a little shakily. His head ached. The fumes in the cabin weren't intolerable, and already the air plant was whining its eagerness to make the air pure and scentless. Red smoke from the open outer air-

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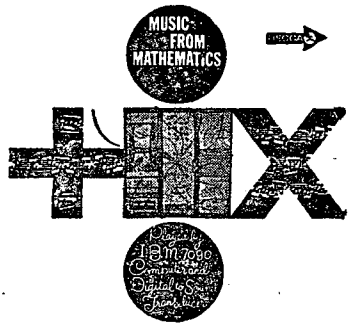

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hole, outside the ship, dying away. "What made him explode?" he wondered.

"The water," said Chris Luden. "What a wild chemistry he must have! I want to be there when we meet a live one."

"But what about the well? We *know* he used water," Henry protested.

"Yes, he did. He sure as hell did. And did you know that an octopus eye is identical to a human eye?"

"Sure. But a well is a well, isn't it?"

"Not when its a crematorium, Harry. What else could it be? There's no fire on Mars, but water must dissolve a body completely. And wouldn't I like to know what the morticians charge their customers for those cut diamond building blocks! The hardest substance known to man or Martian! An everlasting monument to the dear departed!"

—LARRY NIVEN

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Galaxy Bookshelf

By Algis Budrys

A full year's worth of these columns has now marched past, like a herd of migratory fern trees. It is time to recapitulate, and to explain.

First let me explain. Some of you have expressed a certain bewilderment at the tone I take; the occasional bursts of disrespect, the sometimes sly and illucid asides. "What is he trying to *say*?" they ask, thus betraying the fact we never speak of— that a review column these days must first of all be a vehicle for a philosophy of literature, and only secondarily a guide to my ideas on how your book money should be spent.

Well, my philosophy is much involved with the mutually interesting fact that somewhere in every publishing house there is a man who sees the making and distributing of books as a business. He is called the business manager; he can change policy, fire editors and thus excommunicate writers, dictate the production and promotion budget and thus stand responsible for the $4.95 price-tag on a book produced for eighty-seven cents and promoted for a dollar. While his immortal breed lives, all authors, editors and readers are involved in a business transaction no different from those involving canned soup or painted turtles. That is the essential fact — all philosophizing, hero worship, collecting of incunabula, fine talk of hobbyistic fellowship, all, *all*, are mere detail. These people want *your money*. To get it, they will hire the services of editors whose personalities and intelligence may be

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more or less attractive, may reflect more or less love or knowledge of the field, but are governed in effect by what is happening in the market. Not in the temple — in the market. Writers know this—perhaps only on those difficult days of the fiscal month, but they know it.

Again, it is fashionable in one construct of writingship to take the view that we are all brethren and sistern; all valiant, all virtuous. This view of "D'Ye Ken John Peel?" being sung around the sacred flame by a twinkling band is maintained principally by people who get farther at literary politics than they do behind typewriters. (This is a fact gathered by personal observation over a period of years, and you might as well believe it.) It is noteworthy, to me, that the writers who continue to satisfy the public year in and out are solitary warlocks, eschewing most pretenses at gentility, seeking out the company of only a selected few of their own kind, and then hardly for the purpose of scratching each other's backs.

Rightly or wrongly, these people are aware that what they sell for money is the same thing that gives them a species of private ecstasy. They do not always like themselves or each other. For money and for the joy of having created, they are in competition with each other —that is, with other warlocks. All others, they disdain. They are in competition with the same few they care to know; though they have different ways of expressing it, some rough and some smooth, some sapient and some naive, they all know it and respect and hate each other for it, and go a long way to zing each other or to help each other in various rough ways that have nothing to do with chaining the daisy. Without reference to actual objective talent or mort of recognition, they are the ones who make the cloud eat the moon and the wheat to burst forth from the thaw, and their pride is such that they die each time they muff.

In part, this is because they are convinced they are in a field — whatever their particular field — where so many lesser creatures do bad work and sing hosannah about it in lapping voices. There is a sort of blind war between them and the marshmallow-suckers, whatever their field; like all solitary things, be they demons or angels, they must contend with the fact that the suckers will band together, thus making the conflict more or less even. Out of that conflict and out of the nature

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of proud things and the nature of sexton beetles come terribly good writing, exciting bad writing, smoothly glib writing and a great deal of incidental dross from people who can do it well enough to sell but haven't been around long enough to learn whether they are makers or users.

Out of the results of all this come the "trends" and "directions" in "literature" — that is, out of what the makers make well, and out of what the users can sup from it to keep themselves alive until the next good thing is made.

From this rabble of people under arms, some of them wearing parts of salvaged kit from either army, all of them "writers," the editors make their selections and the publishers package their products — that is, they bet on various remedies of warlock, various twinings of sucker, and the stability of various compromises that have been reached as C models a book on what B has done in relation to an apparently purely new thought by A, which A may have thrown away in the core of an otherwise worthless short story written because he was promised the price of his rent in exchange for any 1500 words that would justify his name on the cover.

I hope you have always known it is these ways; that independent of any thrill of invention or discovery you may exchange among you — reader, writer, editor, publisher—there is the forest ferment of creativity as a thing in itself, and also the purse-lipped feasting and surreptitious salivating, and the simple arithmetic of money. I hope you have long ago guessed that what ties it all together is that we are all as much enemies as we are friends — that we take from each other and prey on each other as well as give and confer; that there is real terror in the heart of a broken warlock and the heart of the sucker who hears his tread about him, real avarice in how they regard each other.

In their lives is grubbiness as well as real delight and glory; the difference between a maker's story of treachery and a user's is that the maker has in fact been a traitor in his life at some time, and his life is in his chosen peers — his treacheries as well as his vengeances were conducted on his kind and himself. As were his loves. And all this is sold for money, by him as well as by those too polite to betray or to love, but not too modest to peek.

Clear? Ah, well, perhaps by this time next year . . .

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But in the context of the above, let us recapitulate.

I would like to announce the first annual Galaxy Bookshelf awards for pre-eminence in impressing me with one's work during the past fiscal year. These are given for work published in book form, irrespective of any previous publication outside that format. The actual awards consist of one heartfelt oath of envy, each, and are collectible at the first mutual opportunity following this announcement:

Philip K. Dick, for *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, the best science-fiction novel of the year. (I notice they are calling it some kind of half-conscious failure, friend.)

Poul Anderson, for *Time and Stars*, the best collection of the year; for "Escape From Orbit," the best short story of the year, as published in that collection. (That's two oaths, one of them in Lithuanian.)

Doubleday & Company, Inc., for *The Rest of The Robots* (an omnibus of Isaac Asimov), the single most useful publishing idea of the year.

Donald A. Wollheim, of Ace Books, for doing his job.

Ultimo, I extend an apology to various people I have slighted and insulted in these pages over the past year; forgive me — I misunderstood you.

Many, many years ago, Avram Davidson and I were in the same racket, he on his side of the street, I on mine. I speak of the men's true adventure writing business; in my case, "true". He was superb—an exhaustive researcher combined with a masterful prose technician, better, if possible, at that than he was at fantasy or sf (though he recoils to see that judgment here). His articles, mainly for the old *Cavalier*, were genuinely valuable and striking pieces of reportage on such things as the charge of the Light Brigade — which he did better in his compass than *The Reason Why* did in its — and such conscientious, painstaking jobs as his piece on Sam Woodfill, the World War I American soldier who ought to have been as well-known as Alvin York.

I inject myself into this review of Avram's *Masters of The Maze* (Pyramid) for three reasons, of which the first is that I was typical of all of the people I knew in that racket except Avram. I hope I do not totter publishing empires by admitting that we made it all up about Richthofen having been shot down because he had his mind on a masochistic blonde. We rolled our eyes in dumbstruck wonder when we saw Avram actually writing to real people

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for personal reminiscences on his famous subjects, and traveling great distances to check his facts on the spot. I cannot imagine he made a profit on it, and I doubt his editors realized what accounted for his accomplishments. The second reason is that the "true" adventure writer who serves as the human protagonist for *Masters of The Maze* is of the more numerous breed — a hack stuck in his groove, seeking yet one more variation on "Love-Starved Arabs Raped Me Often," chirping too hard on his bottle and wanting nothing to do with the dying organization of old men who have for so long guarded Earth against the subtle invasion of the Chulpex.

The Chulpex are one of the most real, more horrifying menaces from parallel worlds dreamed up by a science-fantasy writer. John Schoenherr's cover captures one precisely; when I read the book, they put me in mind of the crunch of dried shrimp, but I would not like to have the jaws necessary to crunch a Chulpex.

The bare bones of the plot are soon-enough told: the Chulpex are inhuman, intelligent and avaricious. They live in a parallel world. A dimensional maze connects many parallel universes, obeying its own geometry, providing crossover doorways at odd and unexpected places. On Earth, an obscure sub-organization of Masonry has for many years been guarding all the exits from the maze — which, by the way, is where Ambrose Bierce went — but all these people are very old. The hack writer is the closest living relative of one of them, and he is inveigled into taking up his inheritance as a guardian before he fully understands it. Because he is ignorant, a particularly avaricious freelance Chulpex slips by him on its way to found a dynasty of its own — a privileged Chulpex guard with ineluctable jealousy, bearing such wonderful herd-bull names as Arristemurriste and Arrettagoretta. In his hunt for/flight from the maverick, Nathaniel Gordon (who may be a friendly gibe at Randall Garrett, but see below) reaches such places as the land of the Red Fish People, which is eminently a place where Ambrose Bierce would have loved to spend his declining years. With the aid of these Polynesoid but Siniacally scientific people, a tender maid and others of her gender, Gordon enjoys lots of luck and a sort of glorifying desperation which makes him one of the Masters of the Maze and thus fit company for Lao-Tze (who, with Appolonius of Tyana, Benjamin Bathurst and

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sundry ilk, exists at the Center of the maze). Then he goes off to accomplish the destruction of the Chulpex, and of a right-wing Terrestrial statesman who planned to use the Maze.

No/one — *no one* — but Avram Davidson could have made of this wreck-save-the-world plot a thing of such polished beauty (if the Baroque is beautiful to you). It wafts of the incense of scholarship for its own sake, of reference both classical and fannish, of the ridiculous device which is in fact the only plausible assertion, once you reflect on it — I mean, who else *but* Appolonius and Benjamin Bathurst . . . you follow me? I mean — well, hell he made me believe it — this has got to be the oldest sf plot of them all, and to it Davidson has brought the storehouse of his mind, overturned it and made a kaleidoscope. *"Communist Chulpex Ate My Wife,"* Nate Gordon muses as he renounces the detached life of the Masters and thinks he is going to die. He goes to live instead for six days with the Lost Tribes on the shore of the river Sambatyon, walking across when it rests on the Sabbath, and could *you* have written that? You could know about hairy-chested men's adventure titles, and conceivably the Lord would then let you live long enough to also know about the Sambatyon, but could you have put them both within a paragraph of each other in a novel partially about the Masonic Order and incidentally about the political workings of a Southern town?

I do not promise you that you will enjoy this novel, and if you do not, I hope you will not weary yourself by plugging through it regardless. Though it is good as a novel it still has marks of the short story writer all over it — some of them, as indicated, fascinating. But aside from being a very fine piece of light reading, it promises a lot for the Davidson novels of the future, and this is, in the style of the back-page ads in the magazines we used to work, Your Chance To Get In On The Ground Floor.

By stretching a point only slightly, we could say that all three books reviewed this time concern themselves with Earth's lonely guardians. Davidson's Nate Gordon is the traditional Poor Frightened Civilian who picks up the trailed string and finds himself ultimately unravelling the Universe; Keith Laumer's Retief is his direct opposite number.

Galactic Diplomat, Doubleday, $3.95, is a collection of nine Retief stories, from *If*, and all

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we ever deduce about Retief the man is that something inside him can't help but be affected by the fact that his name is "fighter" pronounced backwards. Not one blessed other thing are we told about what he is, as distinct from what he does. What he does is solve a lot of problems involving a lot of alien races who worship gods named Uk-Ruppa Tooty; where he works is in the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne, usually as a nominal flunky to ambassadors named Nitworth. Nitworth (or whoever) blimps his way into trouble with one of these exotic races, either by believing what their rulers tell him or by trying to pull the wool over their eyes. Retief coolly, patiently—and daringly —repairs the damage by being either in touch with the common people or by contravening Nitworth's stupid interpretation of Earth's policy (which is also left totally unexplained). Retief is always right and Nitworth always gets the credit. Retief is in short and in this aspect, a combination of James Bond and Passepartout. James Bond and Alexander Botts? Marlon Brando and Dr. Zorba?

I must confess I enjoyed the daylights out of this book, without for an instant being able to distinguish between one story and the next, or any other Retief stories. The copyright dates range faithfully up through the years from 1961, and I am sure there will be several items here you have missed. I would wait for the paperback, since four bucks is a lot for nine shots from the same angle, but I may have underestimated your fondness.

Dominic Flandry (of *Flandry of Terra*, a collection of novelettes by Poul Anderson. Chilton, $3.95) walks the middle way; lonely, self-assured, concerned with his personal integrity in the service of Earth's corrupt empire, a trace more physical than cerebral — but very physical — he is the sort of series adventure hero who undermines himself because he is too real to have had so many things happen to him. But if you do not pause to wonder about this, the stories about him are good — have been good since they started coming out in *Planet* when Anderson was much younger and presumably had not yet stopped to think that someday his whipcord-slim, perfectly handsome hedonistic hero would stop to think: *"Well — I suppose it all serves the larger good. It must. Our noble homosexual Emperor says so himself."*

The quote is from "The Game

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of Glory," opening story in this volume. It was first published in 1957. "A Message in Secret" is from 1959, and the concluding story, which takes up half the book, is "The Plague of Masters," 1960.

Back in the days when Flandry first appeared, he was overshadowed by Anderson's *Planet* novelettes about thallasocrats and autocthones on the ruddy seas and plains of Mars. As "A. A. Craig," Anderson was turning out these more than adequate variations on the theme of Leigh Brackett, and so were as many other *Planet* writers as were able. Flandry — modelled faintly after The Saint, not much after Northwest Smith and certainly not after Brackett's Rhiannon — was nothing much more than a change of pace, and as I recall he did not strike the proper spark in faithful sf adventure readers (me). This now seems a great pity, though Chilton is repairing my oversight for me, this being the second Flandry book from them.

Anderson, as you must know, writes adventure stories with all the trappings — dramatic weather, fantastic but solid settings usually with a touch of the second-derivative nostalgic to them (the cities are like Robin Hood's Nottingham; the freeman foresters among the giant trees of "Plague" remind one of Flash Gordon's Arborea), sloe-eyed ladies of pantherish grace or Amazonian warrior-maids fighting two-handed, and much exploitation of Anderson's physical and social science background, which permits the hero to be arcanely physical in relation to technology. He rides a knee-steered motorcycle into battle with the motorized nomads of the great steppes of the planet Altai; in the same story, "A Message in Secret," he flies in the clutch of a giant aeromedusa which metabolizes hydrogen. The balance has tipped. Flandry is not too seriously out of tune with the sort of thing Anderson does most often these days, and assuming you like stories about heroes like, Matt Helm — as distinguished from stories about heroes like Nero Wolfe — you might like Flandry rather more than you do Nicholas Van Rijn, though I personally see no need to prefer one over the other.

In "The Game of Glory," Flandry's assignment is to find and kill an agent of the Merseian Empire, Earth's rival. Earth is corrupt, its empire great, the graft so pervasive that Flandry's methods for staving off the Long Night yet one more generation are always on the cheap.

In 1959, ("A Message in Se-

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cret"), the writing is not as good. Too, Flandry does some flatly incredible things, such as instantly being able to ride one of those handlebar-less motorbikes at 200 kilometers per hour, which I suppose Retief could get away with, but then he smirks out the secret of how he got the vital message to Terra, and that's not like him. Perhaps he didn't care whether the bike would kill him; perhaps he was ruffled enough at missing the girl to want to preen a little about the message.

"The Plague of Masters" is about a freelance effort of Flandry's — he is not even on assignment when he investigates the mystery of Unan Besar, the Malaysian planet. Nor has he any clear reason for deciding it's too suspicious to pass up. Having discovered that the government of Unan Besar is a technocracy based on the crude fact that only the biochemists control the supply of monthly antidote pills for the planet's bacteriological poison, he goes off wenching and adventuring very cleverly, with a girl picked up in Act Two, and his only real object for the longest time is to get pills to stay alive with, when nothing essential prevented his playing Act Eight as Act Three. With the Arboreans — sorry; the Ranauans — he overthrows Ming the — no, Tuan Soku Bandang — and . . .

Well, I would not have you think I'm being snide at Anderson's expense. But for one reason or another, the devil-may-care hero of the earliest stories became the socially conscious inner-directed man of 1957, the seeker - out - of - extracurricular-adventure in 1960. What he gave away prodigally in his first flush of manhood he regrets in his prime, and now he takes it. Perhaps he thinks his own Long Night is coming. I hope not. I like him; he is not the young merchant-adventurer or technologist, nor the hotblood popinjay however deadly, one encounters so often in Anderson's settings these days. They are all indubitably heroes, and I recognize them, admire them, and will read about them in preference to many other things. But I like Flandry because he is trying to do his best with really very few skills or backstops in a very complicated world; he does it so much better than I do that I can pleasurably delude myself he is like me.

— ALGIS BUDRYS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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In the Imagicon

by GEORGE HENRY SMITH

The world was imaginary, but it was vital to his survival — as a relief from the world around him!

Dandor leaned back on the warm, silk of the lounge and stretched, letting his eyes wander up to the high ceiling of his palace and then drop down to the blonde who knelt at his feet. She was putting the finishing touches on his carefully manicured toenails while the voluptuous brunette with the mobile hips and the full red mouth leaned forward to pop another grape into his mouth.

He studied the blonde, whose name was Cecily, and thought about the other service she had performed for him last night. That had been nice . . . very nice. But today he felt bored with her, just as he was bored with the brunette whose name he couldn't remember at the moment, and with the cuddly redheaded twins and with . . .

Dandor yawned. Why were they all so damn worshipful and always so eager to please?

It was almost, he thought with a wry grin, as though they were products of his imagination, or rather — and he almost laughed aloud — of that greatest of all man's inventions, the Imagicon.

"There now, don't they look nice?" Cecily said, sitting back to admire his finished pedicure with pride.

Dandor looked at the ten shin-

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ing objects of her gaze and grimaced. It made him feel pretty silly.

Then Cecily made him feel even sillier by leaning over and kissing his right foot with passionate red lips. "Oh, Dandor! Dandor, I love you so much," she murmured.

Dandor resisted the temptation to use one of his newly pampered feet to give her a healthy kick on her round little bottom. He resisted it because even at times like this, when his life with these women began to seem unreal, he tried to be as kind as possible to them. Even when their worship and adoration threatened to bore him to death, he tried to be kind.

So instead of kicking Cecily, he yawned.

The effect was almost the same. Her blue eyes widened in fear, and the brunette raised wide eyes from the grape she was peeling, her lips starting to tremble.

"You . . . you're going to leave us, aren't you?" Cecily asked.

He yawned again and patted her head absentmindedly. "Just for a little while, darling."

"Oh, Dandor!" the brunette wailed. "Don't you love us?"

"Of course I do, but — "

"Dandor, please don't go," Cecily begged. "We'll do anything to make you happy!"

"I know," he said, getting to his feet and stretching. "You're both very sweet. But somehow I just feel drawn to — "

"Please stay," the brunette pleaded, falling at his feet. "We'll have a party with champagne. Any kind of pleasure you desire. We'll go get the other girls . . . I'll dance for you . . ."

"I'm sorry, Daphne," he said, finally remembering her name, "but you girls are beginning to seem unreal to me. And when that hapens. I must go."

"But — " Cecily was crying so hard she could hardly get the words out — "when you leave us . . . it's a-almost . . . as th-though we were . . . turned off."

Her words saddened him a little because in a way it was true. When he left it was almost like turning them off. But true or not, he couldn't do anything about it because he felt himself being drawn irresistibly toward that other world.

He took one last look around at the incredible luxury of his palatial palace, at the beauty of his women and at the warm sun shining through the windows, and then he was gone.

The first thing he heard when he came out of the Imagicon was the howling of the wind and the first thing he felt was the numbing cold.

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The net thing that assaulted his ears was the rasping screech of his wife's voice. "So you finally came out of it, did you?" Nona was yelling. "It's about time, you good-for-nothing little runt!"

So he was really back on Nestrond, back on the coldest hell of a colonial world in any universe. He had often thought that he would never return. But here he was . . . back on Nestrond and back with Nona.

"You've been gone long enough!" Nona said. She was a big, raw-boned woman with stringy black hair, a broad, flat face with thin lips and uneven, yellowish teeth.

God but she's ugly, he thought as he stared at her. Beside her, Cecily and the others are goddesses.

"It's a good thing you got back 'cause the ice wolves is actin' up and we need frozen ice moss for the fire and . . ."

Dandor just stood there and listened as she went on with the long list of chores that needed doing. Why, he wondered, didn't she get one of her boy friends from down at the mines to do these things? He knew without being told that her lovers had been around while he was "gone." Nona was as faithless as she was ugly. And since there were twenty men to every woman on this planet, she had plenty of opportunity.

". . . and the cattleshed needs a new roof," she finished. When he didn't answer immediately, she thrust her face close to his. "Did you hear me? I said there's things to be done!"

"Yes, I heard you," he said.

"Then don't stand there like an idiot. Sit down and eat your breakfast and then get out and get to work!"

Breakfast was a thick, greasy piece of rancid pork and a bowl of lukewarm grits. Dandor choked on it but finally forced it down. Then he put on his thermal suit and furs and started for the door.

"Here, stupid!" Nona said, picking up a face mask from a pile of litter on the table and flinging it at him. "You want to freeze your nose off?"

He slapped the mask on quickly so she wouldn't see the anger on his face, opened the door and plunged out. The wind hit him in the face, hurling jagged ice crystals against his mask. Nestrond! My God, why Nestrond? He thought longingly of the comparative warmth of the cabin as he stared out at the bleak landscape. He thought of the black box that was the Imagicon. It sat in the one clear corner of the cabin and was the only way back to . . .

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But no, he couldn't go back yet. There were too many things to be done here. So with an axe over his shoulder, he started across the frozen waste to the ancient peat bog where they cut their fuel.

All morning long, with the wind raging at him and the bitter cold making every breath an aching torment in his chest, he cut and stacked the frozen peat. Then when the pale yellow sun peeked through the clouds of ice crystals for a moment and he saw it was almost directly overhead, he tied up a large bundle of the brick-like slabs and hoisted it onto his shoulder for the trip back to the miserable huts of Nestrond.

Nona slapped a bowl of thin soup and a piece of stale bread down in front of him and called it lunch. He ate in silence and then went out behind the cabin to spend the afternoon digging the new cesspool.

This made the work of the morning seem like a rest cure. The ground had been frozen since Nestrond first started to roll around its inadequate sun. By evening, his back and legs and thighs ached tormentingly. With only a foot of ground excavated, he had to give up when night fell and staggered back toward the cabin with only one thought in mind . . . sleep.

The howl that wrenched him from his first troubled slumber seemed to come from the deepest pits of hell.

"Wha . . . what's that?" he asked.

"Ice wolves, you fool!" Nona screeched. "They're after the cattleshed! Get out there and stop them!"

Dandor staggered to his feet and fumbled for his clothes as another howl rent the night. He reached for his laser rifle while Nona yelled again. "Hurry up! Those things can rip logs off a shed like it was kindlin'."

He was out the door then with flashlight in one hand and rifle in the other. He saw them at once. There were two of the six-legged terrors. One of them was raised up on its four back legs, its massive jaws ripping at the timber of the shed. Dandor could hear the terrified bellow of the cattle inside.

He ploughed through the snow toward the creature. It heard him and turned fiery red eyes in his direction. It kept on slashing at the logs for a second and then whirled and came at him in great leaping bounds.

Caught by surprise, he had no time to drop the flashlight and lift the laser rifle to fringe position. He had to fire from the hip and the beam caught the monster in the shoulder.

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It wasn't good enough. He sidestepped as the huge body hurtled past him and then blasted its head off. Then he almost died himself as the decapitated thing went slithering through the snow, spurting blood everywhere. He almost died because for a split second he had forgotten its mate.

He remembered only when the creature struck him from behind and sent him sprawling on the frozen ground. The monstrous beast was on top of him and he screamed as a claw ripped flesh away from his thigh and the powerful jaws moved toward his throat.

The flashlight had been flung from his hand but the real rifle was still resting in its sling attached to his shoulder. He found the trigger and fired at full power. The laser beam tore off a leg and haunch of the ice wolf, and it fell away from him as he blasted it again. Then blackness closed in over him.

When he came to, he was lying on the table in the cabin. Nona and a strange man were bending over him.

"Well, you got yourself in a pretty mess this time!" Nona said as his eyes opened.

"That leg is going to have to come off," the stranger said.

"Are you a doctor?" Dandor asked in a husky croak.

"Only one this side of Alpha Centaury," the man said.

"The pain . . . can't you give me something for the pain?"

"I gave you the last morphine I had. Back on Earth we might have saved that leg, but here — " He made a helpless gesture.

White-hot flame seemed to envelop the slashed leg. Dandor winced and then saw the half smile on Nona's lips as she said, "With no more morphine or anything else, cutting off that leg is gonna hurt like hell, ain't it, Doc?"

"I got some whiskey in my car," the doctor said. "I'll go get it."

He went hobbling off, and Nona leaned over Dandor and looked into his eyes. "It's really gonna hurt, sweetie. It's gonna hurt like it hurt me all those times when you went off and left me. When you went off in your black box."

"No, Nona, no! It didn't hurt you. You're not — " He almost said she wasn't capable of being hurt. But he stopped, because he didn't know for sure if that were true.

"With only one leg, you're not gonna be able to get in that damn thing by yourself," she said. "You're gonna have to stay here and be nice to me."

"Nona!! No, you don't under-

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stand!" He started to plead with her, but then the doctor was back with a quart of whiskey and his black bag.

"Here, drink this fast," the man said, handing Dandor the bottle.

He drank deeply and quickly. But it didn't help much.

As the doctor cut and sawed, Dandor was sure his screams would burst his skull. At times he wondered why his curses didn't snap the straps that held him down or drive off the two tormentors bending over him.

"Well, I guess that's it," the doctor was saying when the agony dragged him up into consciousness again. "We're gonna have to cauterize this stump or he'll bleed to death. I ain't got nuthin' but fire to do it with either. Come help me heat up the poker, woman."

Dandor came fully awake as he caught the over-the-shoulder look Nona gave him and saw her eyes dart toward the Imagicon. It was almost as though she had said aloud, "You'll belong to me now . . . only to me. There won't be no more of that goin' off."

But she couldn't! How could she? Through the haze of morphine, alcohol and pain, Dandor tried to ask himself . . . why should she treat him this way? He couldn't think of any answer.

And as they hurried off to prepare the cauterizing iron for the bloody stump of his leg, the black coffin-like shape of the Imagicon filled his eyes and his mind.

If the pain hadn't already been more than reason could bear, he wouldn't have had the courage to roll off the table and begin crawling toward the black box, leaving a trail of blood behind him. The black box. Somehow he knew it represented a surcease from pain, a promise of ultimate safety.

He reached it without their being aware of his actions, and by making a supreme effort, he pulled himself up high enough to press his palm against the sensor that identified him instantly and was the only thing in this or any other universe that could open it.

He collapsed, more dead than alive, into the Imagicon and it closed silently over him.

Then there was a bright, warm world around him, and bright young faces above him.

"Oh, Dandor, darling! Darling," Cecily cried, putting her soft, warm arms around him.

"Sweetheart, you've come back!" Daphne whispered.

"We're so happy to see you!" the redheaded Terri murmured

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"We're so happy to see you!" her twin, Jerri, repeated.

"And I'm the happiest of all!" Dandor assured them, gazing down at his leg... at his perfectly whole, intact leg which felt no pain whatever. "Thank God! Thank God, I'm back!"

The Imagicon had worked! It had worked once again! It had taken him to the world of imagination and back again to reality... to wonderful, wonderful reality!

WHY are they talking about me?

Because America is no longer *ashamed* to talk about me and other children with birth defects. And America is doing something to stop birth defects through March of Dimes treatment and research.

FIGHT BIRTH DEFECTS
Join MARCH OF DIMES

Dandor sat up and looked around at his own warm, marvelous world. It was the world of Earth in 22300, the world a hundred years after The Plague. the Plague which had attacked the male genes and reduced the male population to a few thousand and made each man the center of an eager and worshipful harem of women.

Many of the surviving men had not been able to stand the strain. Too many years of adoration, too many years of having everything and every woman they wanted had proved too much for them.

Then there had come the Imagicon, the invention that made any world a man desired seem absolutely real. Some men had used it to create even more exotic and wonderful worlds than the one they lived in, but that had been only more of a good thing and had made them more dissatisfied than ever.

Dandor had been wise. With his Imagicon, he had created an entirely different kind of world ... a world of cold and terror called Nestrond. Dandor had known a great truth.

What good was paradise without something to compare it to? Without a taste of hell from time to time, how could a man appreciate heaven?

—GEORGE HENRY SMITH

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MULLIGAN, COME HOME!

by ALLEN KIM LANG

Everybody knows Mulligan. He's the fellow that turned the Solar System upside down and shook it!

"Ours is essentially a tragic age," the Chief said, polishing his Dunhill pipe against the side of his Roman nose; "so we refuse to take it tragically."

"Very well put, sir," I ventured to comment.

"But this man," he went on, tapping with his pipe-stem the 3-D xograph of Mulligan Mondrian on his desk, "refuses to take our age even seriously. Because of his *jeux d'esprit*, Thai rice-production is off thirty per cent. Coffee is twelve dollars a pound. We've had stiff notes from Canada, Korea and the USSR. Albania is rattling her midget sword in the halls of the UN, egged on by one of Mondrian's monstrous jests. What will he do next? We cannot wait to see. Find the man, Himmel; and I'll get you a GS-12. Fail, and I'll guarantee you steady work weeding lawns for the Sahara Reclamation Authority."

"Sir!" I said. I double-timed out to the waiting jet.

Twenty minutes later, I was unfolding my credentials in the office of a Terre Haute high school. "Felix Himmel, special agent of the Federation of Federal Investigative Agencies, Bureaus, and Committees," I announced to the brunette, richly curved school secretary. "Tell me all you know about Mulligan Mondrian, class of '99."

"I danced with Sweet Mulligan at the junior prom, the happiest night of my life," she said. She closed her eyes and hummed a snatch of *Moonrust*. I patted her cheek to recall her to the present. "Mulligan had class," she said. "He rode to school in a Rolls Royce Silver

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Wraith phaeton. His chauffeur wore steel-gray gauntlets and called Mulligan *mein Herr*. Once he let me sit at his table in the school cafeteria. We had a sturdy little Burgundy with our sloppy joes." She sighed and slipped a folder under my arm. "His records, Felix."

"Business first, my small," I murmured, peeling her importunate fingers from the back of my neck. I flipped through the file. "H'm, what's this?" Signed by the teacher who'd served as head of the English Department and third-assistant basketball coach (Defense) during my subject's high school career, it was a memo reporting: "Mulligan has got the Athalete's Foot." Some sleuth's-instinct led me to slip this bit of paper into my pocket. "Later, sweetness," I said, freeing myself, unlocking the door, and closing it firmly behind me. I made down the hall to interview the incumbent of the Mulligan Mondrian Memorial Chair of Classical Sanskrit.

Swami Jairamdas T. Chattopadhyaya, though having no English, did speak Malayalam, which I'd had drummed into my head during that mess on the Malabar Coast. Swamiji, characteristically inverted in the Sirshasana posture, explained that his department had been endowed as Mondrian's parting gift to his high school; and that the presentation had been made with the stipulation (unique, so far as I know, in Hoosier secondary education) that each future student, as prerequisite to graduation, maintain satisfactory grades during the four-year course. Chatt's only hint as to Mondrian's present whereabouts was a terse, "Look to the stars."

The department plane took me next to Monte Carlo, where I spoke with the now-retired teacher who'd served as Dean of Boys during the Mondrian years at Central High.

I learned a bit more about Sweet Mulligan's Bunny-Herd, that corps of sketchily attired drum majorettes who had attended the lad in study hall and at basketball games. Nothing more. "I should enjoy helping you Federal fellows find Mondrian," my host testified, enriching my tulip-glass yet again with his exquisite brandy. He frowned as a shadow passed over the patio. "You must find him," he said. "But all I can tell you, Mr. Himmel, is that hunting after white whales was always Mondrian's chief sport. When you catch up with him, I wager he'll be holding his harpoon poised to puncture something pale, fat and smug. Why don't

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you inquire at the University? It was always one of his favorite fishing-grounds."

Plump and pale, but no longer proud was the night custodian of the student lounge at Indiana University's Department of Xenology, in the School of Overskies Studies. Once splendid in tenure, lately President of the Big Ten University, the custodian now wore Iron Man overalls and chewed Brown's Mule as he related to me the Scandal of Double-oh-naught.

"Eldritch, Mr. Himmel, how that gentle-talkin' broth of a lad warmed his way into our hearts; only to destroy 's." Mondrian's researches in Martian philology were from the first so insightful ("though it's been proved his best translations were cribs from the works of Elbert Hubbard") that his professors eagerly accepted the boy's offer to take on the task of reading proof for *The Loose-Leaf Enchiridion of Demotic and Hieratic Martian Epigraphy,* a prestige journal in its field. Under the proofreadership of Mulligan Mondrian, the *Enchiridion,* originally a biennial, began appearing daily; and with both a morning and an evening edition. The subscription-list, eleven names when the brilliant freshman entered upon his work, forced a press-run of half a million copies before the unfortunate President of the University, casually leafing through a current issue, discovered to his horror ("my each particular hair stood on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine; and you better believe it!") that proofreader Mondrian had tunneled into Jordan Hall, home of the Kinsey Institute, to secure entertaining copy.

The young journalist had run, as serials, the confidential sex-diaries of three dozen historical figures, living and dead; and had illustrated them with four-color selections from the pornographic art of five continents and three planets. Despite an *amicus*-brief arguing that the youngster's limerick-sequence, *Mars is a Four-Letter Word,* represented a giant step forward in epigraphic exegesis, Mondrian got the brush, the President his broom.

Working on the clue that my subject preferred a scarce Canadian whiskey, I picked up his trail in Ottowa. My plants in the Ministry of External Affairs could not (or would not) reveal how Mondrian obtained Canadian citizenship, nor why Parliament commissioned the callow youth to carry on ethnographic surveys in the far north.

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"Muktuk Mulligan," as he was dubbed by his adoring, all-girl scientific team, headed into the permafrost country so late in the year that seasoned arcticists warned that he'd be caught by the first blizzards.

As indeed he was. Mondrian and his staff were forced to huddle together through the winter in a trapper's hut on Victoria Island. (Floor plans of the hut have recently appeared in a popular publication. The reader is directed to "Playboy's High-Latitude Hideaway," *Playboy*, vol. 49, no. 3; March '02.)

The explorers' return, none the worse for their privations, amazed the scientific world, as did Mondrian's announcement of his discovery of a race of Spanish-speaking Eskimos inhabiting a previously uncharted island in Viscount Melville Sound. By the time the chilled "Eskimos" (a busload of Texican migrant agricultural workers recruited from Michigan tomato-fields on the pretext they'd be paid 35c a peck for gathering reindeer moss) had been rescued from their "island" (a Dow Styrofoam raft constructed by Mondrian for the purpose of his hoax), the adventurer had sold his memoirs to half a dozen newspapers, including the New York *Times* ("Northern Community Preserves Tradition of Cervantes, de Vega"), *Pravda* ("Refugees from Falangist Revanchism Battle Snow, Ice"), and *The National Insider* ("Hot-Blooded Northmen Sleep Raw.)

The Republican Canadian Mounted Police traced Mondrian to Hong Kong, where they lost their man. Drawing upon the ABC's Secret Fund, I purchased a suggestion that Hong Kong is convenient to Seoul, where a year ago there had rested on the lawn before the Presidential Palace a pearl of great price.

Built by Krupp of Essen for Korea's inchoate *force de frappe*, the spaceship *Prince of Heaven* was the first of the bubbleships, a vessel that commanded the power of a force-field to float it, a steel-and-vacuum balloon, up through the expensive first three hundred miles of the gravity-well to a launching-pad within the suburbs of space.

M. Jules d'Harnoncourt Pak, Commissioner of the Surete Nationale de Coree, spoke to me:

"That damned fellow with the beard properly seduced our National Assembly, speaking the French of a Racine with the vigor of a Voltaire. Lying in his excellent teeth, he maintained that he'd discovered on Ganymede celadon grave-

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furnishings dating from the earliest Silla Dynasty. This was dizzy stuff to our legislators, who had just been introduced to *La Gloire*; and who had thereupon passed a law making compulsory the teaching of our history as Nation Number One, beginning:

"Hwanung, son of the Creator, visited a Korean pine-forest in 2333 B.C., from which date our years are yet reckoned. The distinguished tourist there surprised a lovely virgin, just transformed from hairy beardom to smooth womanhood. Hwanung breathed upon the girl, conceiving by his respiratory art Tang-'un, born some fifteen minutes later as the first King of Korea. Officially.

"Well, now," Commissioner Pak continued. "This bewhiskered youth, whom I most sincerely believe to have been camel-spawn Mulligan Mondrian, represented that he required our spaceship (everybody's income-tax for the next ten years) to explore Heaven more completely, there to search out the starry homeland of the founder of our Hermit Kingdom.

"So we gave him our SS *Prince of Heaven*, cheering wildly and singing our *Chant National*, a song with the same tune, and on this occasion much the same spirit, as the *Auld Lang Syne* caroled by inebriated Western boulevardiers on 31 December.

"Mulligan Mondrian had appointed as his co-emissary to the gods the teen-aged and nubile daughter of our President." M. Pak sighed. "No bear, she. Although from the manner in which Mondrian breathed upon her I should not be entirely amazed were she to give birth in season to a new King of Con. Be that as it may, our visitor and his tender lieutenant rose skyward, followed by our agnostic prayers. More *kimchi*, Himmel-*Sonsang*?"

Regretting my first, I declined a second serving of this Korean piece de resistance, a sort of sauerkraut blended with soy-sauce and lent authority by mature fish. I was flying to the moon, and had been warned to prepare for the journey by ingesting a low-residue diet.

Moonside, I munched Tums and drove by rented crawler to Eratosthenes Station in the south Aprennines. It was there, on pretext of searching for traces of the moon-insect swarms described by W.H. Pickering in 1924, that Mondrian mined ice from a fossil glacier, purchased calcium carbide from a Chinese sourdough working the Marco Polo quarries and with the help of his Korean girl-friend blended the two to produce acetylene

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gas, which he hydrated and hydrogenated to manufacture a very fair grade of ethyl alcohol. (The curious reader is invited to use the margin of the page to work out the equations of this amusing reaction, not forgetting to utilize finely-divided nickel as catalyst.) Mondrain watered down the juice from his chemical plant for sale to the Russian station at Copernicus as Smirnoff Vodka, accepting in payment Soviet diamonds from the pipes of Mount Dyson.

Just before his moonshine plant was raided by the Lunar Authority's Revenue Agents, Mondrian escaped, leaving behind the Korean President's daughter and taking with him both his ill-gotten diamonds and the Soviet scientific team's junior selenologist, Sonia Nebitskaya Suslik, whom he had won at blackjack.

As footnote, it will be remembered that the Lunar Authority's men claim to have discovered in Mondrian's abandoned bubblehut more than a thousand living individuals of a mantis-like creature, each the length of a man's hand, each having eight twelve-jointed legs and four rudimentary wings.

When the agents burst into the bubblehut, according to their subsequent report, these lunar arthropods attempted to communicate by scratching elaborate geometrical designs in the dust of the furniture. These were, needless to say, the controversial Mondrian Mantes. No specimen of this insect has yet been examined by a trustworthy xenologist, inasmuch as in his amazement Captain (now Private) Finnian Fenn had left Mondrian's airlock wide open. Abandoning their efforts at graphic communion, the entire company of mantes hopped off to disappear in the shadows of the Sinus Aestuum ("Bay of Summer"), singing in telepathic chorus. "It was very like," Pvt. Fenn told me, "a marching-band of tiny glockenspiels."

Their ship stocked with frozen dinners and foul-weather gear, Mulligan Mondrian and Miss Sonia Nebitskaya Suslik set out for Pluto, counting on the superiority of their Korean vessel to win them a planetfall never before achieved.

Captain Mondrian's first cis-Martian task was to re-christen his stolen vessel the *Star Ship Kalman*, painting on her bow the name of his personal hero, that 12th-century foe of censorship and King of Hungary, Kalman the Book-Lover.

Why did Mondrian undertake so arduous a journey?

I asked just this question of

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Miss Suslik, whom I met in the Virgo Room of the Constellation Club, in Atlantic City. "Chust for laughs," Miss Suslik suggested. She recalled that Mondrian had with him an enormous banner of the Peoples' Republic of Albania, which he would often wave about his head in the ship's lounge, shouting ribald, pseudo-Stalinist slogans; and that he had among his papers a passport issued by that most Plutonian of nations. My guess is that he amused himself by picturing the discomfiture of those U.S. and Soviet astronauts who would someday reach the farthest island of our solar sea only to find the double-headed eagle of their pipsqueak adversary already in possession.

As to the tedium of the trip, "We were nod," Miss Suslik reported to me, blushing prettily across her Pavlov Fizz, "always wavink flags."

Somewhere beyond the orbit of Neptune, the SS *Kalman* received a Mayday call in standard Morse. Surprised to hear English spoken (so to speak) so far from home, the *Kalman*'s skipper radared in on the signal.

The ship that appeared on his viewscreens was, to employ Mondrian's meiosis, another breed of cat.

The paradox of an extrasolar beings having recourse to an Earthly call for help was explained when Mondrian visited the alien ship. Its sole passenger, whom we now refer to as the Brunswick Creature, had just left our planet; and had come down with one of those *tourista* complaints that so often vex the delicate traveler.

Mondrian consoled the Brunswick Creature as best he could, then returned to the *Kalman* to get a can of white powder from the medicine cabinet in ship's head. He allowed Miss Suslik to accompany him back to the Creature's vessel, it being locked to the *Kalman* by an access-tub.

The testimony that follows is transcribed from a tape-recording of Miss Suslik's debriefing, held at the Virgo Room, Atlantic City, where the junior selenologist was abandoned by her whilom protector. It may be helpful to hold in mind the fact that the Russian girl was blonde, blue-eyed and contoured a perfect 97-61-91; that her tongue struck English consonants with the sweetness of a lovingly plucked, far-off balalaika; and that the girl had three advanced degrees in xenography and four double Pavlovs at the time of our interview. I quote the tape:

HIMMEL: "Please describe, Miss Suslik, the physical appearance of the Creature."

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SUSLIK: "You got this game, Mr. Himmel, I have seen on the Tay Bay, where people hurl globes at standink-on-their-ends clubs? Okay? Da. Bowlink. So. Such a ball, so big . . ."

HIMMEL: "Let the record reflect that Respondent standing (very prettily) on tiptoe, holds her right hand approximately three meters from the carpet."

SUSLIK: "Had in globe slot, like for fingers? Outside of Creature all shiny black. Slot all fuzzy white. Creature talked Russian and English, creaky squeaky, like had sore t'roat. Voice from out of slot. Had learned from Chicago. Had visited. Had watched 'round. Also in Minsk."

HIMMEL: "Did you, Sonia Nebitskay, ascertain what manner of information this surreptitious surveillance was designed to adduce?"

(Translation difficulty resolved as):

HIMMEL: "Why he snoop?"

SUSLIK: "Creature is travel-writer and professional greedy."

(Translation difficulty resolved as):

SUSLIK: ". . . gourmet."

The next several responses consist largely of semantic quibbles between myself, darling Sonia and the bartender of the Constellation Club. In precis:

The Brunswick Creature is hermaphroditic (or, as Mondrian said, "AC/DC, with portable power"). It utilizes its single orifice, or omnipore, for ingestion of food and drink, for excretion, for reproduction ("they extrude, secrete and exult," Sonia Nebitskaya explained, "but only in private"), for sensing the environment with a battery of transducers (rather like a photocopy machine, the Creature sees only items it engulfs, its omnipore being studded with eyes and coated with a luminescent membrane) and for sound-production. This settled, back to the tape.

HIMMEL: ". . . nother couple o" drinks. How, Sonia sweet, did your companion propose to assist the creature?"

SUSLIK: "Sweet Mulligan, he crawl into Creature's mouth-etc. With flashlight, he look around inside. He call me to hand in can of white powder. I hand in can of white powder. Mulligan sift white powder around inside Creature, like salting giant clam. Comes out."

HIMMEL: "Did Mulligan Mondrian, who after all had studied xenology at the prestigious School of Overskies Studies, have any explanation of the Brunswick Creature's distress?"

SUSLIK: "Sweet Mulligan, he tell Creature, 'Man, you got

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worst case Athlete's Foot of the Orifice I ever seen.' Creature then explain how he got exposed. Outside Japanese tea-house, he sees line of shoes, look like succulent lizards of his native land. Hungry, tired of biscuits and Spam, he eats shoes. 'Stringy,' he writes in notebook. 'No star for Japanese inn.' Then, one day later, is Creature sick. Cannot see, excrete, extrude, exult or talk plain."

HIMMEL: "... and this can of white powder that Mondrian scattered inside the Brunswick Creature?"

SUSLIK "... is Dr. Scholl's for Athlete's Foot. Sweet Mulligan has same trouble, but (*snicker*) wit' him, does not interfere wit' extrudink, exultink, secretink, etc."

HIMMEL: "Steppe-blossom, was Mondrian's medication effective?"

SUSLIK: "In one day, was Creature all good again! And so happy! He say, *Anyt'ing you wan', Baby, iss yours!*"

HIMMEL: "How did Mondrian reply to the Creature's offer of carte blanche?"

SUSLIK: "To offer of white card, Sweet Mulligan reply, 'I got good healt', dirty mind and good-lookink woman. What more could ex-Eagle-Scout esk? My momma, she said I wouldn't be satisfied wit'out little green fence around the world; but I'm pretty heppy now, t'ank you very much. Here, if you want to do somet'ink for me, Creature-fella, maybe you stop, say "Hello" next time you're in Solar System.' And Sweet Mulligan write his name and ZIP-code on card, which he insert in Brunswick Creature."

HIMMEL (rather overwrought): "Did you see that card, Miss Suslik? Do you know Mulligan Mondrian's present whereabouts?"

SUSLIK (tearfully): "If I know where iss Sweet Mulligan, you t'ink I be sitting in stinkink Atlantic City wit', no offense, capitalist jackal?"

HIMMEL: "Oh. Did Creature reply to Mondrian?"

SUSLIK: "Creature replied. 'Here is to get me,' he say; and give Sweet Mulligan small box with toggle-switch, designed for being operated inside orifice but okay with fingers in a pinch. 'Give me a ring any time, Doc,' Brunswick Creature say; and then 'Good-by;' and we go back to SS *Kalman* and to Pluto and Atlantic City, in that order. And when I come out after powderink my nose, he iss gone."

Thus far the record.

I've failed to get hold of either Mulligan Mondrian or that toggle-box wherewith the Brunswick Creature can be talked to.

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And the woodpile is still out there.

Appearing some three weeks ago, squeezed out of nowhere like so many Fred Hoyle hydrogen atoms, wooden stakes three-by-thirty miles in cross-section, painted Nile green, began to circle the Earth, three hundred miles up.

These fence-posts interfere with astrogation, agriculture and man's contemplation of his universe.

Though the Chief's taken me off the Mondrian case, I've still got a vital mission. I'm weeding out the centers of the O's in the message we're planting in the Sahara Desert Reclamation Area. Grassy fields each some fifty miles long-by-wide, shaped to be visible from space, our ninety-four oases spell out Mother Earth's plea to her wandering Mondrian:

PLEASE
COME HOME MULLIGAN
WHEREVER YOU ARE
PLEASE
WE'LL FORGET ALL YOU
DID, IF YOU'LL CALL IN
YOUR PICKETS

**

RSVP END

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THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT

by FREDERIK POHL

Illustrated by WOOD

Mankind was rich beyond avarice and to all intents and purposes immortal . . . and it was doomed!

XIV

Once, many years before (it was actually several centuries, counting the deep-freeze time), little Chuck Forrester had caused a three-car auto smash that put two people in the hospital.

He had done it with his little slingshot, lying out in the tall grass next to his house in Amityville, taking shots at the cars on the highway. His aim was too good. He hit one. He got a state policeman in the eye. The cop had lost control, jumped into the opposite lane, sideswiped a convertible and skidded into a station wagon.

Nobody died; the policeman didn't even lose his eye, though it

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE—

His name was Forrester, and he had been burned to death.

But not permanently . . . for the medical science of six centuries of progress had learned how to freeze a man at the instant of dying, hold him in the slow, dreamless calm of the liquid helium chambers . . . and bring him back to life with all his mortal wounds healed and his body as strong and healthy as it had ever been. He might die again — but the same science that had brought him back to life could do it again, and again.

He was, in fact, immortal. And so was all the world. Brave world! thought Forrester, amazed and delighted, and set out to enjoy his new life; and within hours of waking up, on his first day in the new life, he was killed again.

Why? It had been senseless — an unprovoked beating. He was put back together again and turned loose; but he was out of money, and needed a job; and the fine new world no longer looked so fine.

But Forrester had friends to help him — a girl, Adne; her two children; a few others. They showed him how to apply for a job; he did; he got it — and discovered that his new employer was an alien from a planet of the star Sirius, sworn enemy of everything on Earth!

He lost the job and lost his money, and found himself with the poor unfortunates of the 26th Century called "The Forgotten Men". The one friend he made there was brutally killd before his eyes. Then the Sirian he had worked for found him, and tricked him into making it possible for the Sirian to escape Earth — presumably to gather a war fleet to begin Earth's invasion!

was close for a while; and as it happened they didn't think to look around the neighborhood for kids with slingshots. The accident went down on the books as due to a pebble thrown up by a passing car. But Chuck didn't know that. For a solid year afterward he woke up in a sweat of fear every night, and all his days were horrors of anticipating being caught.

It was just so now.

It was perfectly clear to Forrester that he was the one who had helped the Sirian circumvent the electronic defenses that kept the aliens bound to Earth. He could work it out step by step in his mind. The Sirian had shopped around until it found a human being ignorant enough, and pliable enough, to be unsuspicious. It had contrived to program him to fly it to the site of an obsolete, but still work-

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able, spaceship. The Sirian had been unconscious, or in whatever state in a Sirian passed for unconscious, so that the electronic alarms would register nothing. It had commanded him to load it aboard the ship and launch it into space.

And he had done as he was commanded, in the fuzzy-minded suggestibility it had doped him into.

Perfectly clear! He could see every step. And if he could, certainly others could. All they had to do was take the trouble to think it through, and certainly all the world was thinking hard about the Sirians. The view-all was full of news: special investigating teams ransacking the site of the take-off for clues, a hundred new probes launched to guard the perimeter of the Solar System. Condition Yellow alert declared and everyone cautioned to remain within easy distance of a raid shelter at all times.

Forrester kept waiting for the hand to fall on his shoulder and the voice to cry: "You, Forrester! You are the man!"

But it did not come. . . .

Meanwhile, the flap over the escape of Sirian Four had had one good effect, and that was that Adne was so interested in the excitement that she became friendly to Forrester again. She even fed him, let him clean himself up in her bath and, as the children were off on some emergency drill with their age-peers, gave him their room to sleep in when it became obvious he was near collapse.

Voices woke him — Adne's and a man's.

"— mostly for the kids, of course. I'm not so worried for myself."

"Natch, honey. God! At a time like this! Just when the Society's ready to swing."

"It wouldn't be so bad, but it makes you wonder about a lot of other things. I mean, really, how could they *let* that thing escape?"

A masculine growl: "Hah! How? Haven't I been telling you how? It's letting machines do men's work! We've put our destiny in the hands of solid-state components, so what do you expect? Don't you remember my White Paper last year? I said, 'Guarding men's liberties is a post of honor and only the honored should hold it.'"

Forrester sat up, recognizing the voice: Taiko Hironibi. The Luddite.

"I thought you were talking about the coppers," said Adne's voice .

"Same thing! Machines should do machine work, men should do men's — hey, what's that?"

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Forrester realized he had made a noise. He stood up, feeling ancient and worn, but somewhat better than before he slept, and was coming out toward them even before Adne answered Taiko. "It's only Charles. Come in here, Charles, why don't you?"

Taiko was standing before the view-wall, joymaker in his hand. His thumb was on one of the studs, and apparently he had just been giving himself a shot of one brand or another of euphoria. Even so, he glowered at Forrester.

"Oh, don't be like that," said Adne.

"Huh," said Taiko.

"If I can forgive him, you can forgive him. You have to make allowances for the kamikaze ages."

"Hah," said Taiko. But the euphoria prevailed — either that from the joymaker, or the spice of danger that was sweeping them all. Taiko clipped the joymaker to his belt, rubbed his chin, then grinned. "Well, why not? All us human beings have to stand together now, right? Put 'er there."

Gravely they shook hands. Forrester felt altogether ridiculous doing it; he was not sure what he had done to offend Taiko in the first place, he was not particularly anxious to be forgiven by him now. Although, he reminded himself, Taiko had once offered him a job, and a job was something he needed. Though with the Sirian threat so urgent and imminent now it was at least an open question whether the Ned Lud Society would need any more workers. . . .

It could not hurt to find out. Before he could change his mind, Forrester said rapidly: "I want you to know, Taiko, that I've been thinking a lot about what you said. You were right, of course."

Taiko's eyes opened. "About what?"

"About the danger of the machines, I mean. What I think is, men should do men's work and machines should do machine work."

"Yes?"

"There's only one computer you can trust." Forrester tapped his skull with a forefinger. "The one up here."

"Sure, but — "

"It just burns me up," said Forrester angrily, "to think that they left the safeguarding of our planet to solid-state components! If only they'd listened to you!"

With part of his attention Forrester could hear a smothered giggle from Adne, but he ignored it. "I want you to know," he cried, "that I've come to some

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conclusions over the last few days, and I'm for the Ned Lud Society a hundred per cent. Let me help, Taiko! Call on me for anything!"

Taiko gave the girl a look of absent-minded puzzlement, then returned to Forrester. "Well," he said, "I'm glad to hear that. I'll keep that in mind, if anything comes up."

It took all of Forrester's self-control to keep his expression friendly and eager; why was Taiko being so *slow*? But Adne rescued him. Suppressing her giggles, she said excitedly: "Say, Taiko! Why don't you give Charles a job with the Society? I mean, if he'd be willing to take it."

Taiko frowned and hesitated, but Forrester didn't give him a chance. "I'm willing," he said nobly. "I meant what I said; glad to help."

Taiko shrugged after a second and said, "Well, fine, then, Forrester. Of course, the money's not much —"

"Doesn't matter a bit!" cried Forrester. "It's what I want to do! Uh, how much?"

"Well, basic scale is twenty-six thousand —"

"A day?"

"Sure, Forrester."

"It doesn't matter," said Forrester largely. "I only want to serve any way I can." And, exultant, he allowed himself to be given a drink to celebrate, which he enlarged to be a meal, Adne tolerantly amused.

And all the while the view-all was displaying scenes of alarm and panic unheeded.

Forrester had not forgotten that he had betrayed the Earth to the Sirians, he had only submerged that large and unpleasant thought in the smaller, but more immediate, pleasure of having escaped from the Forgotten Men. He drank a warm, minty froth and ate nut-like little spheres that tasted like crisp pork; he accepted a spray of a pinkly evanescent cloud from Adne's joymaker that made him feel about seventeen again — briefly. Tomorrow would be time enough to worry about what he had done to the world, he thought. For today it was enough to be eating well and to have a place in the scheme of mankind.

But all his worries came back to him when he heard his name spoken. It was Taiko's joymaker that spoke it, and it said: "Man Hironibi! Permit an interruption, please. Are you in the company of Man Forrester, Charles Dalgleish?"

"Yes, sure," said Taiko, a beat before Forrester opened his mouth to plead with him to deny it.

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"Will you ask Man Forrester to speak his name, Man Hironbi?"

"Go ahead, Forrester. It's to identify you, see?"

Forrester put down the cup of frothed mint and took a deep breath. This pink cloud of joy might as well never have been. He felt every year of his age, even the centuries in the freezer. He said, because he could think of no excuse for not saying it: "Oh, all right. Charles Dalgleish Forrester. Is that what you want?"

Promptly the joymaker said: "Thank you, Man Forrester. Your acoustic pattern is confirmed. Will you accept a message of fiscal change?"

That was quick, thought Forrester, clutching at a feeling of relief; the thing only wanted to asknowledge his new job! "Sure."

"Man Forrester," said Taiko's joymaker, "your late employer, now permanently removed from this ecology, left instructions to disburse his entire residual estate as follows: to the League for Interspecial Amity, one million dollars; to the Shoggo Central Gilbert and Sullivan Guild, one million dollars; to the United Fraternity of Peace Clubs, five million dollars; the balance, amounting to ninety-one million seven hundred sixty-three thousand one hundred forty-two dollars, estimated as of this moment — mark — to be transferred to the account of his last employee as of date of removal, to wit yourself. I am now so transferring this sum. Man Forrester. You may draw on it as you wish."

Forrester sank weakly back against the cushions of Adne's bright, billowy couch. He could not think of anything to say.

"God bless," cried Adne, "you're rich again, Charles! Why, you lucky creature!"

"Sure are," echoed Taiko, grasping his hand warmly. Forrester could only nod.

But he was not really sure that he was so lucky as he seemed. Ninety-one million dollars! It was a lot of money, even in this age of large numbers! It would keep him in comfort for a long time, surely; it would finance all sorts of pleasures and pursuits; it would remove him from the whim of Taiko's pleasure and insure him against a relapse to the Forgotten Men. But what would happen, Forrester thought painfully, when someone asked, first, who that late employer happened to be — and why that employer, before returning to his native planet circling around the star Sirius, had so lavishly rewarded Charles Forrester?

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XV

"You look tired, Charles," said Adne kindly.

"Sweat, his wealth worries him," said Taiko, grinning.

"You ought to come with us and relax," Adne nodded.

"It's everybody's duty to keep fit — now more than ever," Taiko urged.

"You're being very good to me," Forrester said gratefully. But what he really wanted was to sit in that room and watch the view-wall. One by one the remote monitoring stations of Earth's defense screen were reporting in, and although the report from each one of them so far was the same — "No sign of the escaped Sirian" — Forrester wanted to stay with it, stay right in that room watching that view-wall, until there was some other report. To make sure that Earth was safe, of course. But also to find out, at the earliest possible moment, if the (hopefully) recaptured Sirian gave out any information about his accomplice. . . .

"Well, we're going crawling," said Adne. "And we really ought to take off right now."

Forrester said irritably, "Wait a minute, what did they just say about Groombridge 1830?"

"They said what they've been saying for a week, *dear* Charles. That thing they spotted is only a comet. Are we going to crawl or aren't we?"

Taiko said humorously, "Charles is still a little dazed with his new loot. But look, old buddy, some of us have got things to do."

Forrester took his eyes from the view-wall's star map and looked at Taiko, who winked and added: "Now that you're on the team, you ought to learn the ropes."

"Team?" said Forrester. "Ropes?"

"I have to do a communication for the Society," Taiko explained. "You know. What you used to call a widecast. And as you're on the payroll now you ought to come along and see how it's done, because frankly —" he nudged Charles — "it won't be too long before you're doing them yourself."

"But first we crawl," said Adne, "so shall we the sweat get *going*?"

So they hustled Forrester along, muttering and abstracted as he was, until he realized that he was attracting attention to himself. He stopped, because he didn't want to do *that*.

It might be, thought Forrester, that the right and proper thing for him to do was to go to someone in authority — if he ever

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ound anyone in authority in this world, except maybe the joymaker — and say, frankly and openly, "Look, sir. I seem to have done something wrong and I wish to make a statement about it. Under what I guess was hypnosis I made it possible for that Sirian to escape, thus blowing the whole security of the human race forever." Confess the whole thing, and take his medicine.

Yes, he thought, some time I probably had better do just that. But not right now.

Meanwhile he tried to look as much like everybody else as he possibly could, and if this required him to be thrilled but casual about the danger of an invasion fleet of Sirians appearing in the sky at any moment to crush Earth, then he would do his best to seem thrilled but casual.

"Well," he cried gaily, "we sure had a good run for our money! Best little old masters of the planet I ever saw! But may the best race win, right?"

Adne looked at him, then at Taiko, who shrugged and said, "I guess he's still a little shook."

Dampened, Forrester concentrated on observing what was going on around him. Taiko and the girl were bringing him to a part of Shoggo he had not previously visited, south along the shore to what looked like a left-over World's Fair. Their cab landed and let them out in a midway bustling with groups and couples in holiday mood, surrounded by buildings with a queer playtime flavor. Nor was the flavor confined to the buildings. The place was a carnival of joy and what Forrester at once recognized as concupiscence. The aphrodisiac spray that individual joymakers dispensed in microgram jolts was here a mist hanging in the air. The booths and displays were shocking to Forrester, at first, until he had a few deep breaths of the tonic, the invigorating air. Then he began at last to enjoy himself.

"That's better," cried Adne, patting him. "Down this way, past the Joy Machine!"

Forrester followed along; observing his surroundings with increasing relaxation and pleasure. The place was a horticultural triumph as well as everything else. Flowers and grasses grew out of the ground he walked on and the margins at his sides; out of elevated beds that leaned out to the midway with emerald grapes and bright red luminous berries; out of geometrical plantings that hung on the sides of the buildings. Even on the walk itself, among the happy humans, there were what looked like shrubs bearing clusters of peach

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and orange-colored fruits — but they moved. They stumped clumsily and slowly about on rootlike legs.

"In here," said Adne, clutching at his arm.

"Hurry up!" cried Taiko, shoving him.

They entered a building like a fort, and went down a ramp surrounded by twinkling patterns of light. The concentration of joymaker spray was a dozen times stronger here than in the open air. Forrester began to feel lightheaded, and to look at Adne with more interest than he would have believed that day would allow him in anything but Sirians. Adne leaned close to nibble his ear; Taiko laughed in pleasure. They were not alone, for there was a steady stream of people going down the ramp with them, fore and aft, all flushed-faced and excited.

Forrester abandoned himself to the holiday. "After all," he shouted to Adne, "what does it matter if we're going to be wiped out?"

"Dear Charles," she answered, "shut up and take your clothes off."

Surprised, but not very, Forrester saw that the whole procession was beginning to shed its outer garments. Shaggy vests and film-and-net briefs, they were lining the floor, where busy glittering little cleaning creatures tugged them away into disposal units. "Why not?" he laughed and kicked off his slippers at one of the cleaners, which reared back on its wheels like a kitten and caught it in mid-air. The crowd rolled down the ramp shedding clothes at every step until they were in a sort of high-vaulted lounge and the noise of laughter and talk was loud as a lynching.

And then a door behind them closed. The cloying joymaker scent whisked away. Streams of a harsher, colder essence poured in upon them; and at once they were all standing there, nearly nude and cold sober.

Charles Forrester had had something less than four decades of actual life — that is to say, of elapsed time measured by lungs that breathed and a heart that beat. The first part of that life, measured in decades, had taken place in the twentieth century. The second part, measured in days, had taken place after more than half a millenium in the freezing tanks.

Although those centuries had sped by tracelessly for Forrester, they represented real time to the world of men; each century a hundred years, each year 365 days of twenty-four hours.

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Of all that had happened in those centuries Forrester had managed to learn only the smallest smattering. He had not learned, even yet, what powers this century could pack into a wisp of gas. Playing with the studs of his joymaker or submitting to the whims of his friends, Forrester had tasted a variety of intoxicants and euphorics, wake-up jolts and sleepy jolts. But he had never before tasted the jolt that drugged no senses but sharpened them all. Now he stood in this room, Taiko on one side of him and Adne in the circle of his arm surrounded by half a hundred other men and women; and was fully awake and sensing for the first time in his life.

He turned to look at Adne. Her face was scrubbed bare, her eyes were looking at him unwinkingly. "You're nasty inside," she said.

What she said was the exact equivalent of a slap in the face, and Forrester accepted it as such. He growled, "You're a trollop. I think your children are illegitimate, too." He had not intended to say anything of the sort.

Taiko said, "Shut up and crawl."

Over his shoulder and without passion, Forrester said: "You're a two-bit phoney without an ounce of principle or a thought in your head. Butt out, will you?"

To his surprise, Adne was nodding in agreement; but she said: "Pure kamikaze, just like the trash you come from. Vulgar and a fool." He hesitated, and she said impatiently, "Come on, kamikaze. Let it out. You're jealous too, right?"

Theirs was not the only argument going on; there was a bitter rumble of insult and vituperation all around them. Forrester was only marginally aware of it; his whole attention was concentrated on Adne, on the girl he had thought he might be in love with, and his best efforts were devoted to trying to hurt her. He snapped, "I bet you're not even pregnant!"

She looked startled. "What?"

"All that talk about picking a name! You probably just wanted to trick me into marrying you."

She stared at him blankly, then with revulsion. "Sweat! I meant *our* name. Charles, you talk like an idiot."

Taiko shrilled, "You're both idiots! *Crawl.*"

Forrester spared him a glance. Curiously, Taiko was down on his knees.

For the first time Forrester realized that the floor was damp

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— no, not damp, muddy. A thin gruel of softly oozing mud was pouring in from apertures in the wall. Others were getting down into the mud, too; and for possibly the thousandth time since being taken from the freezer Forrester found himself torn between two choices of puzzles to try to solve. What was going on here, exactly? And what the devil did Adne mean by "our" name?

But she tugged at him impatiently, slipping down to wallow in the porridgy substance. "Come on," she cried. "You're not doing it right, but come on, you sweaty kamikaze!"

All the while the air was being recharged with the stimulant, if it was a stimulant, that had opened the gates of his senses for Forrester. It was like LSD, he thought, or a super-benzedrine; he was seeing a whole new spectrum, hearing bat-shrieks and subsonic roars, smelling, tasting, feeling things that had been out of his reach before. He perceived clearly that this was some sort of organized ritual he was in, understood that one of its purposes, at least, was to allow the release of tensions by saying whatever the inner mind had wanted to say, and the outer censor in the brain had forbidden. Allow it? He couldn't stop it! He listened to the things he was saying to Adne and realized that at a later time, in an undrugged moment, he would be appalled. But he said them.

And she nodded gravely and replied in kind. "Jealous!" she shrieked. "Typical manipulative ownership! Filthy inside, trashy!"

"Why shouldn't I be jealous? I *loved* you."

"Harem love!" sneered Taiko from beside him. The man was lying full length in the mud now — it had reached a depth of several inches and seemed to have stopped there. "She's a brainless blot of passions but she's human and how *dare* you try to own her?"

"Fake!" howled Forrester. "Go pretend you're a man! Bust up some machines!" He was furious, but in a part of his mind he was alert enough and analytical enough to be surprised that he wasn't impelled to hit Taiko. Or Adne, for that matter. What he was impelled to do was to say wounding things, as true and hurtful as he could make them. He looked around him and saw that he was the only one still on his feet. The others were all full-length in the mud, writhing and creeping. Forrester dropped to his knees. "What's this damn foolishness all about?" he demanded.

"Shut up and crawl," grunted Taiko. "Get some of the animal

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out of you." And Adne chimed in:

"You're spoiling it for all of us if you don't crawl! You have to crawl before you can walk."

Forrester leaned down to her. "I don't *want* to crawl!"

"Have to. Helps you get out the rot. The secrets that fester — of course, you kamikazes like to decay."

"But I don't have —"

And Forrester stopped, not because he voluntarily chose to stop talking just then but because what he had been about to say was not true, and he simply could not say it. He had been about to say that he had no secrets.

He had, in fact, more secrets than he could count; and one very large one which appalled him because his mouth wanted to blurt it out even while his brain screamed *No!*

If he stayed in this room one more moment, Forrester knew, he would shout at the top of his voice the fact that he had been the one who helped the Sirian escape and thus made it a good gambling bet that the whole world of men would be destroyed.

Dripping mud, panting, mumbling to himself, Forrester climbed to his feet and forced himself to run — a staggering, broken-field run that dodged flailing limbs and leaped over writhing bodies, that carried him through the angry rumble of the crawlers and out into a dressing chamber where he was sluiced down with fragrant spray, dried with warm blasts of air and bathed in hot light. Fresh garments appeared before him, but he took no pleasure in them. He had forgotten for a moment, but now he remembered again.

He was the man who had destroyed the Earth. At any moment he would be found out. . . . And what his punishment might be, he dared not think.

"Man Forrester," cried the voice of a joymaker, "during the period of interrupted service a number of messages accumulated for you, of which the following three priority calls are urgent."

"Wait up," said Forrester, startled. But there it was. Rummaging through the neatly folded heap of tee-shirt and Turkish pants, there was the macelike shape of a joymaker. "Ho," he said. "I've got you again, eh?"

"Yes, Man Forrester," the joymaker agreed. "Will you receive your messages?"

"Um," said Forrester. Then, cautiously, "Well, I will if any of them are of great urgency at this very moment. I mean, I don't want somebody coming in

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here and blowing my brains out while I'm talking to you."

"No such probability is evident," said the joymaker primly. "Nevertheless, Man Forrester, there are a number of highly important messages."

Forrester sat down on a warmed bench and sighed. He said meditatively, "The thing is this, joymaker. I never seem to get to the end of a question, because two new questions pop up while I'm still trying to find the answer to the first one. So what I would like to do right now, I would like you to get me a cup of black coffee and a pack of cigarettes, right here in this nice, warm, safe room, and then I would like to drink the coffee and smoke the cigarettes and ask you some questions. Now, can I do that without dying for it?"

"Yes, Man Forrester. However, it will take several minutes for the coffee and cigarettes to be delivered, as they are not stock items in this facility and must be —"

"I understand all that. Just get them. Now." Forrester stood up and drew the baggy pants over his legs, thinking. At last he nodded to himself.

"First question," he said. "I just came out of a place where Adne Benson and a bunch of other people were wallowing in mud. What was that all about? — I mean," he added hastily, "in a few words, what is it called and why do people do it?"

"The function is called a 'crawl session', Man Forrester, or simply 'crawling.' Its purpose is the release of tensions and inhibitions for therapeutic purposes. Two major therapies are employed: First, there is a chemical additive in the air which suppresses inhibitors of all varieties, thus making it possible to articulate, and thus to relieve, many kinds of tensions. Second, the mere act of learning to crawl all over again is thought to provide benefits. I have on immediate access, Man Forrester, some thirty-eight papers on various aspects of the crawl session. Would you care to have me list them?"

"Not in the least," said Forrester. "That's fine; I understand that perfectly. Now, second question."

There was a *thunk;* a receptacle opened beside him; Forrester reached in and took out a steaming and very large cup of coffee covered with a plastic lid. He worried the lid off, sought and found the cigarettes and lighter that accompanied the coffee, lit up, took a sip of coffee and said:

"Adne Benson said something to me about choosing a name. I

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interpreted this to mean that she was, uh, well, pregnant. I mean, I thought she meant a name for a baby; but actually it was something else. Reciprocal names? What are reciprocal names?"

"Reciprocal names, Man Forrester," lectured the joymaker, "are chosen, usually by two individuals, less typically by larger groups, as private designations. A comparible institution from your original time, Man Forrester, might be the 'pet' name or nickname by which a person addresses his or her spouse, or child, a close friend; however, the reciprocal name is used by each of the persons in addressing the other."

"Give me a for instance," Forrester interrupted.

"For instance," said the joymaker obediently, "in the universe of Adne Bensen and her two children the reciprocal names are 'Tunt' — a form of address from one child to the other — or 'Mim', when Miss Bensen addresses or is addressed by a child. As mentioned, this is not typical since more than two persons are involved. A better example from the same demesne would be that between Adne Bensen and Dr. Hara, where the reciprocal designation between them is 'Tip'. Are those adequate for instances, Man Forrester?"

"Yeah, but what's this about Hara? You mean he and Adne had a pet name?"

"Yes, Man Forrester."

"Yeah, but — Well, skip it." Forrester glumly put down his coffee; it didn't taste as good as he had thought it would. "Sounds confusing," he muttered.

"Confusing, Man Forrester?"

"Yeah. I mean, if you and I have the same name, how do we know which one — oh, wait a minute. I see. If you and I have a name, then if you use it, obviously you mean me. And if I use it, I have to mean you."

"That is correct, Man Forrester. In practice it does not appear that much confusion arises."

"All right, the hell with that, too. Let's see." Forrester frowned at his cigarette; that didn't taste particularly good, either. He was unable to decide whether the reason was that he had lost the taste for coffee and cigarettes, or whether these were simply miserable examples of their kind, or whether what tasted bad was his mood. He dropped the cigarette into the rest of the coffee and said irritably, "Question three: Now that I have you again, and plenty of money, is there some way I can keep from foolishly losing it all again? Can we like work out a budget?"

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"Certainly, Man Forrester. One moment. Yes. Thank you for waiting. I have obtained a preliminary investment schedule and prospectus of probable returns, and by investing a major fraction of your holdings in the Sea of Soup, with diversification in power, computation and euphoric utilities, you should have a firm annual income in excess of eleven million four hundred thousand dollars. This can be prorated by week or by day, if you wish, and automatic limits placed on the amounts you can spend or hypothecate. In this way it will be possible — Man Forrester!"

Forrester was startled. "What the devil's the matter with you?"

"Your instructions, Man Forrester! Urgent priority override: statement made earlier that you are in no immediate danger of death is no longer true. Man Heinzlichen Jura de Syrtis Major, having filed appropriate bonds and guaranties —"

"Oh, no!" cried Forrester.

"Yes, Man Forrester! Coming through the crawl chamber right now, armed, armored and looking for you!"

XVI

Forrester snapped tight the baggy trousers, tucked in the pullover, slipped his feet into sandals and hooked the joymaker to his belt. "Out!" he barked. "Which way?"

"This way, Man Forrester." An opening in the wall widened like a pair of parentheses and Forrester bolted through it. A lounge, a ramp, an open double door and he was out into the midway again, with the bright sun pounding down on him, the gay crowds staring at him casually.

He glanced around: yes, there was the DR vehicle, shining white overhead, its attendant with chin on hand gazing into space. "Where's Heinzie?" he cried.

"Following, Man Forrester. Do you wish to fight him here?" asked the joymaker.

"Hell, no!"

"Where would you prefer, Man Forrester?"

"You idiot, I don't want to fight him at all. I want to get away from him."

He was attracting attention from the crowd, he saw. Their expressions were no longer vacant but puzzled, and beginning to be hostile.

The joymaker said hesitantly, "Man Forrester, I must ask you to be specific. Do you wish to avoid combat with Man Heinzlichen *permanently?*"

"That's the idea," Forrester said bitterly, "but I see it's a

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little late for that now." Because the Martian was churning out of the double doors of the crawling building and heading straight for him. "Oh, well," said Forrester. "Easy come, easy go."

The Martian planted himself in front of Forrester, puffing. He said, "Hello, dere. Sorry I kept you waiting so long."

"You didn't have to hurry on my account," said Forrester cautiously. He was scanning the Martian carefully for weapons, but there didn't seem to be anything. He was wearing what looked like a wig, close blond curls that hugged his scalp, surrounded his ears and jawline and went down in back to the nape of his neck, but otherwise he was unchanged in appearance from the last time Forrester had seen him. And he did not even carry a stick. His joymaker was clipped to his belt; his hands were empty and hung loosely at his sides.

"Vell," said the Martian, "you were with de Forgotten Men, you know, and den I had other things to do. Anyway, here we are so let's get it over with. Okay?"

Forrester said honestly, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

"Fight, you fool!" cried the Martian. "What de hell do you think you're supposed to do?"

"But I'm not even mad," Forrester objected.

"Dog sweat!" roared the Martian. "*I* am! Come on, fight, will you?" But his hands still hung at his side.

Forrester shifted position cautiously, sparing the time for a glance around. The crowd was definitely interested now, forming a neat ring around them; Forrester thought he could see bets being made on the outcome. The DR man overhead was watching them carefully. At least, Forrester thought, if I let him kill me they'll just freeze me up again. And then they'll put me together later on. And maybe the freezer isn't such a bad place to be for a while, until this business with the Siriar gets straightened out . . .

"Are you going to fight or not?" the Martian demanded.

Forrester said, "Uh, one question."

"Vell?"

"The way you talk. I had an argument about that the other day —"

"You're stalling! What's de matter with de way I talk?"

"It's a sort of German accent, I thought, but this other Martian was Irish and he talked the same way —"

"Irish? German?" Heinzlichen looked baffled. "Look, Forrester, on Mars we got 600-millibar

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pressure, you understand? You lose some of de high frequencies, dat's all. I don't know what 'German' or 'Irish' is."

"Say, that's interesting!" Forrester cried. "You mean it's not an accent, really?"

"I mean you wasted too much of my time already!" the Martian cried, and leaped for his throat. And right there, in the bright midway with the ambulatory plants jolting past him and the crowds cheering and shouting, Forrester found himself fighting for his life. The Martian was not only bigger than he was, the damned skunk was stronger! Fleetingly Forrester blazed with anger: how dare the Martian be stronger? What about the supposition that light-gravity inhabitants would lose their muscle tone? Why was he not able to crush this flimsy, light-G creature with a single blow?

But he was not; the Martian was on top of him, systematically thudding his head against the paving of the midway. It was Forrester's good fortune that the flooring was a resilient rubberlike substance, not concrete; all the same he was developing a headache and his senses were spinning. And the Martian added insult to injury: "Get up and fight!" he bawled. "Dis is no fun!"

That was the limit of Forrester's civilization. He screamed in rage and surged up; the Martian went flying. Forrester was up and after him, flinging himself on top of him, a knee in the Martian's throat; he saw the Martian's joymaker loose by his side and caught it up — grabbed it, clubbed it, smashed the macelike large end against the Martian's skull. It rang like bronze. Even in his rage Forrester felt a moment's astonishment; but clearly the close-cropped blond wig was not merely hair. "Louse!" roared Forrester, enraged all over again; the Martian had prepared himself for this battle by wearing a helmet! He shortened his stroke and clubbed the Martian across the face. Blood spurted; teeth broke. Again and again, and the Martian tried to cry out but could not; again, again —

Behind him the voice of the attendant from the DR cart said, "All right, all right, that's enough. I'll take care of him now."

Forrester rocked back on his haunches, panting hoarsely, staring at the terrible ruin he had made of the Martian's face. He managed to gasp, "Is — is he dead?"

"They don't come any deader," said the DR man. "Would you move a little bit? — Thanks. All right, he's mine now. Wait

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here for the copper, please; he'll take care of filling out a report."

What happened next for Forrester was hazy. He had a confused memory of returning to the lavatory facilities of the crawl room and getting cleaned up again, fresh clothes, a shower, a steam of reviving gases that woke him up and cleared his head. But when he was out of the room the fog returned. It was not the drain of his efforts that muddled his thinking, or the pain of his headache where Heinzie had bashed it against the pavement. It was pure psychic shock.

He had destroyed a human life.

Not really, he told himself at once. Not now. A short rest in the freezer and then he's good as new!

But it didn't register with him; he was still in shock.

Adne was waiting for him, with Taiko; they had seen the fight and had stayed to help him get straightened out afterward. Help him or help the Martian, Forrester thought bitterly; it probably didn't matter to them which. Nevertheless he was grateful for their help. Adne took him to her own home, left him there a minute, returned with the news that his apartment was ready for him again and escorted him there. And left him there with Taiko, who wanted to talk. "Nice fight, Charles. Shook you up, of course — hell, I remember my own first one. Nothing to be ashamed of. But listen, if you're going to come to work for the Society you've got to pull yourself together."

Forrester sat up and looked at Taiko. "What the devil makes you think I want to work for the Luddites?"

"Come on, Charles. Look, take a shot of bracer, will you? That green stud, there on the handle —"

"Will you get out of here and leave me alone?"

"Oh, for sweat's sake," cried Taiko impatiently. "Look, you said you wanted to help out with the Society's program, right? Well, there's no time to waste! This is the chance we've been waiting for, man! Everybody's got the Sirians on their minds; they'll be diving into the freezers so fast the teams won't be able to handle them, and that's when those of us who can face the world realistically will have a chance to take action. We can get rid of the machine menace once and for all if we. —" Taiko hesitated and gave Forrester a thoughtful look. Then he said: "Well, never mind that part of it just yet. Are you with us or against us?"

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Forrester contemplated the problem of trying to explain to Taiko that his interest in the Ned Lud Society had been only an interest in making enough money to live on, and that when the Sirian had left him ninety-one million dollars that interest had evaporated. It did not seem worth the effort, so he said: "I guess I'm against you."

"Charles," said Taiko, "you make me sick! You of all people! You, who have suffered so much from this age. Don't you want to try to cure the evils of machine domination? Don't you want —"

"I'll tell you what I want," said Forrester, rousing himself. "I want you to go away — fast!"

"You're not yourself," said Taiko. "Look, when you get straightened out, give me a call. I'll be hard to reach, because — Well, never mind why. But I'll leave a special channel for you. Because I know you, Charles, and I know that you'll have to decide to end these cowardly times and give Man back his — All right! I'm going!"

When the door had closed behind him Forrester stared into space for more than an hour. Then he rolled over and went to sleep.

His only regret was that sooner or later he would have to wake up.

XVII

What Forrester could not understand was why it was taking them so long to arrest him.

He began to see just why a criminal might give himself up. The waiting was hard to endure. Ten times an hour he reached for the joymaker to say, "I am the one who helped the Sirian escape. Report me to the police," and ten times each hour he stopped himself. Not now, he said. Tomorrow, no doubt, or maybe even a few minutes from now; but not just now.

From time to time the joymaker informed him of messages — forty-five of them the first day alone. Forrester refused to accept them all. He didn't want to see anyone until — until — well, he didn't want to see anyone at the moment. (He could not make up his mind at just what moment the world would so clarify itself to him that he would be willing to start living in it again; but he always knew that that time was certainly not yet.) He explored the resources of his apartment, the joymaker and his own mind. He ate fantastic meals and drank odd foaming beverages that tasted like stale beer or celery-flavored malted milks. He listened to music and watched canned plays.

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He wished desperately for a deck of cards, but the joymaker did not seem to understand his description of them and so solitaire was denied him; but he found almost the same anesthesia in reading and reading over again what scraps of written matter he had on hand. His late wife's letter he practically memorized; his briefing manual to this century he studied until his fingers were weary from turning the pages.

On the second day there were nearly seventy messages. Forrester refused them all.

At his direction the joymaker displayed for him selected news pictures on the view-wall. The only subject Forrester would allow himself an interest in was the progress of the trouble with the Sirians. There was strangely little news after the first day — negative reports from drone patrols in every quadrant of the heavens, a diminishing flow of projections and estimates of when an attack might be expected. The consensus seemed to be, not for several weeks at least. Forrester could not understand that at all. He remembered quite distinctly that Sirius was something like fifty light-years away, and the joymaker confirmed that no way had been found to exceed the speed of light. But finally he gathered that it was thought the Sirians had some sort of faster-than-light message capability, as did Earth for that matter, and even if the fleeing Sirian might not make it back to his own planet he might send a message. And it was a possibility, at least, that some wandering Sirian war patrol might be near Sol.

But none made itself evident; and on the third day there were only a dozen messages for Forrester; and he refused them all.

What he did with most of his time was sleep.

He had ninety-one million dollars and perfect health. He could think of nothing better to spend either of them on.

"Joymaker! Tell me what I did wrong with Adne."

"Wrong in what sense, Man Forrester? I have no record of antisocial acts."

"Don't split hairs with me. I mean, why didn't she like me after the first few days?"

The joymaker began to answer with statements about hormone balances, imprinting and the ineluctable components of emotions, but Forrester was having none of it. "Get me a beer," he ordered, "and give me specific answers. You hear everything?"

"Right, Man Forrester. Except when instructed otherwise."

"All right. I offended her. How?"

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"I cannot evaluate the magnitude of the offenses, Man Forrester, but I can list certain acts which would appear to be significantly greater than others. Item, you refused her offer of a reciprocal name."

"That was bad?" Forrester asked.

"It is offensive by social convention, Man Forrester, yes." The glass of beer appeared by Forrester's couch; he tasted it and made a face.

"No, not that," he said. "What was that other thing, the beer with some kind of rasperry sauce?"

"*Berlinerweisse,* Man Forrester?"

"Yeah, get me one of those. Go on with the list."

"Item, your actions when Man Heinzlichen Jura de Syrtis Major filed intent to kill you were considered contemptible in certain lights."

"Didn't she understand that I just wasn't used to the way things go now?"

"Yes, Man Forrester, she did. Nevertheless she considered your behavior contemptible. Item, you allowed yourself to become impoverished. Item, you criticized her for a relationship with other males."

The large goblet of pale beer appeared with a little flask of dark-red syrup; Forrester decanted the syrup into the beer and sipped it. It too tasted terrible, but he had run out of things to ask for and drank it. "It was only that I loved her," he said irritably.

"There are aspects to the syndrome 'love' which we cannot distinguish, Man Forrester."

"Hell, I don't expect you to. You're a machine. But I thought Adne was a woman."

"I can only surmise from the evidence of her responses that she did not comprehend or accept your behavior either, Man Forrester."

"I have to admit you've got a point there," sighed Forrester, putting down the goblet and getting up to roam around. "Well, never mind." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully, then waved a hand; a mirror appeared and he studied his face in it. He looked like a bum. Hair unkempt, beard beginning to grow again. "Oh, hell," he said.

The joymaker made no answer.

What Forrester really wanted to know — whether anyone had come to suspect him of being the one who had let the Sirian escape — he dared not ask. The questions he did ask, on the other hand, turned out to have answers as confusing as the questions were. Even simple

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questions. He had asked after his friend among the Forgotten Men, Jerry Whitlow, for example. He had not been surprised to find out that Whitlow was dead — he had seen that happen; or to learn that his revival was problematical; but he still did not know what the joymaker meant by saying Whitlow was "returned to reserve." It *seemed* to mean that Whitlow's body had been used as raw material, perhaps in one of the organic lakes like the "Sea of Soup" from which the world's food supplies came; but Forrester was too repelled by that notion to follow it any farther, and even so he could not understand why Whitlow's revival would then be "problematical".

"How many messages today, joymaker?" he asked idly.

"There are no messages for you today, Man Forrester."

Forrester turned to look at the thing. That was a welcome surprise — and change was welcome — but it was worrisome, too. Had everyone forgotten him?

"*No* messages?"

"None that you have not already refused, Man Forrester."

"Doesn't *anyone* want to talk to me?"

"As far as indicated by the message log, Man Forrester, only Man Taiko wishes to talk to you. He left special instructions in regard to forwarding of communications. But that was six days ago."

Forrester was startled. "How the devil long have I been here?"

"Nineteen days, Man Forrester."

He took a deep breath.

Nineteen days! How little his so-called friends cared for him! he told himself with self-pity. If they *really* liked him they would have broken the door down if necessary.

But it was not all bad. Nineteen days? But surely if he were going to be arrested for helping the Sirian escape it would not have taken this long. Was it safe to assume the heat was off? Did he dare go back into the world of men?

He made up his mind rapidly; and before he could change it, acted at once. "Joymaker! Get me cleaned up. Shave, bath, new clothes. I'm going outside!"

His resolve lasted him through the cleaning-up process and into the condominium hall, but then it began to dissipate.

No one was in the hall; there were no sounds. But to Forrester it seemed like a jungle trail with unknown dangers on every side. He ordered an elevator cab to take him to slideway level and when the door opened he en-

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tered it cautiously, as though an enemy might be lurking inside.

But it too was empty. And so — he found a moment later — was the wide hovercraft street. There was simply nothing there.

Forrester stared around, unable to believe what he saw. No pedestrians — well, that was understandable. There were seldom very many, and he had no idea what time of day it was. No hovercraft? That was harder to accept. Even if for a moment none were in sight, he should be able to hear the hissing roar of their passage somewhere in the city. But to see no aircraft, no sign of life at all — that was flatly unbelievable.

Where was everybody?

He said, with a quaver in his voice: "Get me a cab."

"One will arrive in two minutes, Man Forrester." And it did — a standard automated air cab; and Forrester still had not seen a human being. He climbed in quickly, closed the door and ordered it to take him up — not up to any place in particular, just up, so that he could see farther in all directions.

But no matter how far he looked, no one was there.

Words forced themselves out: "Joymaker! What happened?"

"In what respect, Man Forrester?" the machine benignly asked.

"Where did everybody go? Adne? The kids?"

"Adne Benson and her children, Man Forrester, at present are being processed for storage in Sublake Emergency Facility Nine. However, it is not as yet known whether space will be available for them there on a permanent basis, and so the location must be considered tentative pending the completion of additional facilities — "

"You mean they're *dead*?"

"Clinically dead, Man Forrester. Yes."

"How about — " Forrester cast about in his mind — "let's see, that Martian. Not Heinzie, the one with the Irish name, Kevin O'Rourke; is he dead too — "

"Yes, Man Forrester."

"And the Italian ballerina I met at the restaurant where the Forgotten Men hung out?"

"Also dead, Man Forrester."

"What the hell *happened*?" he shouted.

The joymaker replied carefully, "Speaking objectively, Man Forrester, there has been an unforecast increase in the number of commitments to freezing facilities. More than ninety-eight point one per cent of the human race is now in cryogenic storage. In subjective terms, the causes are not well established but appear to relate

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to the probability of invasion by extra-Solarian living creatures, probably Sirian."

"You mean everybody committed suicide?"

"No, Man Forrester. Many preferred to be killed by others; for example, Man Heinzlichen Jura de Syrtis Major, who, you will recall, elected to be killed by you."

Forrester sank back against the seat. "Holy sweet heaven," he muttered to himself. Dead! Nearly the whole human race, dead! It was more than he could take in at once. He sat staring into space until the joymaker said apologetically, "Man Forrester, do you wish to select a destination?"

"No — wait a minute, yes! Maybe I do. You said ninety-eight per cent of the human race is dead."

"Ninety-eight point one, yes, Man Forrester."

"But that means there are some who are still alive, right? Are there any I know?"

"Yes, Man Forrester. Certain classes are still in vital state in large proportion because of special requests made for their services — e.g., medical specialists working in the freezer stations. Also there are others. One you know is Man Taiko. He is not only in vital state but has, as you know, given special instructions in regard to receiving messages from you. Another is the Reverend Sam Tshumu, and another — "

"Never mind any other," chied Forrester. "And never mind messages, either. Just take me to Taiko, right away! I want to see someone who's alive!"

Because — went the unspoken corollary — he didn't want to see the ruins left by the dead. Not as long as he was so completely convinced that it was himself who had killed them.

XVIII

But as it turned out, the cab did not take him to see Taiko after all.

It did what it could. The joymaker programmed it properly enough, and Forrester found himself high in a building of bright ruby crystal, at a door inscribed *The Ned Lud Society*. Inside was what he supposed was the latterday equivalent of an office — though it was warm and damp and a fountain played among ferns in it. But no one was inside.

"What the devil's the matter with you, joymaker?" he demanded. "Where's Taiko?"

"Man Forrester," said the joymaker, "there is an anomaly here. My records indicate Man Taiko's presence at this place,

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but clearly they are wrong. My records have never been wrong before."

"Well, let me talk to him. You said he'd left special instructions — "

"Yes, Man Forrester." Pause. Then Taiko's voice came on:

"That you, Charles? Glad to hear from you. I'm busy now, but I'll be in touch when I get a chance — only don't refuse my message this time, will you?"

That was all. "Wait a minute," cried Forrester. "Taiko!"

The joymaker interrupted him. "Man Forrester, that was a recording."

Forrester growled profanely. He walked around the office, examining it, but without finding anything that would help him locate Taiko. "Well, hell," he said. "Let's see. You said somebody else I knew was still alive?"

"Reverend Sam Tshumu is still alive, Man Forrester."

"And who is Reverend Sam Tshumu? I mean, don't give me all his statistics; just tell me what makes you think I know him."

"Acquaintanceship is indicated from the fact that he endeavored to make contact with you at the time of your first emerging from cryogenic storage, Man Forrester. However, Man Tshumu may not be contacted directly at present. If you wish to see him or speak with him you may communicate with the warden of the Shoggo Municipal Detention Facility."

Forrester swore. "Anybody else?"

"Man Forrester, Edwardino Wry is also ambient. Do you consider that he is known to you?"

"I doubt it, because I never heard of the son — wait a minute. Was he one of the ones that beat me up?"

"Yes, Man Forrester."

"Well, I don't want to see *him*. Forget it, joymaker," said Forrester. "I guess I'll just wait for Taiko."

Three or four times he thought he saw people, but he was only able to get close to one of them and it said civilly, "We are not human, Man Forrester. We are merely a special-purpose service unit diverted to aid at the cryogenic facilities." It had looked like a pretty young blonde in a bikini, perhaps a barmaid somewhere, Forrester thought; but was too dispirited to inquire. Apart from those there was no one in sight in Shoggo.

He walked aimlessly, shaking his head.

His long days of self-imposed exile had let most of the guilt

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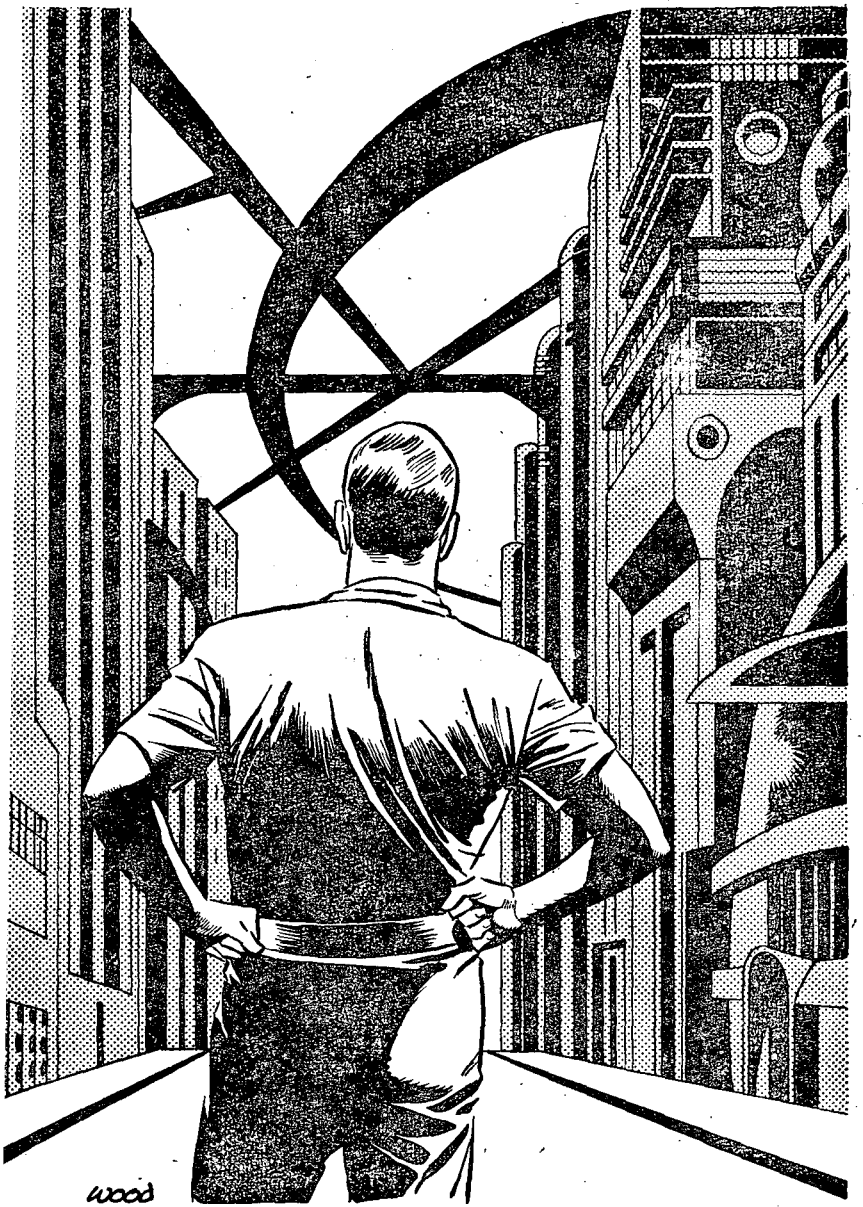

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evaporate from him. He no longer felt either fearful of discovery or humiliated. The Sirian had used him as a tool, true, but if it had not been him it would have been someone else. Anyway, he was more concerned about this world. The year 2527 was a great disappointment to him. He could think of no other age when the response of the populace to a threat of death would have been such universal suicide. It was simply crazy . . .

Of course, he reminded himself, death was not the same to these people as it had been to his contemporaries. Death was no longer necessarily permanent. It was like fleeing to a neutral country to sit out a war, and heaven knew there were lots of 20th century examples of that.

Nevertheless, in Charles Forrester's opinion the world of 2527 A.D. simply was not behaving well. It was chicken.

Forrester filled his lungs and shouted: "You are all cowards! The world's better off without you!" His voice echoed emptily among the tall, hard building faces.

"Man Forrester," said the joymaker, "were you addressing me?"

"I was not. Shut up," said Forrester. "No, cancel that. Get me a cab." And when it came he took it back to the broad hovercraft way where he and Jerry Whitlow had hidden out as two of the Forgotten Men. But there were no more Forgotten Men in evidence, not wherever he looked, no matter how loud he called out. "Take me to Adne Bensen's home," he commanded, and the cab flew him into the entrance port at the mid-tower level of the building they had shared, but there was no one visible there either. Not in the streets, not in the halls, not even in the apartment, after Forrester had commanded the joymaker to let him in.

He ordered himself a meal and sat on the edge of a sort of couch in the children's room, feeling put upon and sad. When he had finished eating he said: "Joymaker, try getting Taiko for me again."

"Yes, Man Forrester . . . There is no new message, Man Forrester."

"Don't give me that! Say it's priority, like you're always doing to me."

"You do not have the authority to classify a message priority, Man Forrester."

"I do if I say I'm planning to kill him," Forrester said cunningly. "You have to notify him of my intentions, right?"

"I do indeed, Man Forrester, but not until you have filed ap-

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ropriate bonds and guaranties. Until you have done so your otice cannot be effective. Do ou wish to file, Man Forrester?"

"Well," said Forrester, thinking bout filling out forms and sign-ng documents, "I guess not, no. sn't there *any* way I can get hrough to him?"

The joymaker said, "I have a aped message from him which I an display on the view-wall if ou wish, Man Forrester. It is ot, however, directly addressed o you."

"Display the son of a gun hen," ordered Forrester. "And nake it snappy!"

"Yes, Man Forrester." The iew-wall lighted up obediently; ut what appeared on it was not Taiko Hironibi. It was a tall, argely built woman with a com-nanding presence who said:

"Girl Goldilocks and Terror of Bears!"

Forrester was startled. "What the devil!" he cried. But the voice went on:

"Bears! Think of bears. Great biting creatures, shaggy-haired, smell of animal sweat and rot. A bear can kill a man — *crunch,* crush his head, *smash,* crash his spine, *zip,* rip his heart." At every word the woman's image acted out crunching, smashing, ripping.

"Hey," said Forrester, "I didn't order any bedtime stories!"

The joymaker said, with almost a tone of apology, "Man Forrester, there is a technical difficulty. I suggest you permit this tape to finish." And meanwhile the woman was orating:

"A girl child, little as you. Littler. Little as you used to be when you were little. Call the girl . . . give her a name . . . let her be called, oh, Goldilocks. Golden hair; locks of gold. Sweet, small, defenseless girl."

Forrester snarled: "Will you turn this damn thing *off?*"

"Man Forrester," admitted the joymaker, "I can't. Please be patient."

"Imagine this girl doing a naughty thing!" cried the woman. "Imagine her going where she should not go, where her mother/father told her not to go. Imagine her rejecting their wise counsel!"

Forrester sank back on the couch and said glumly, "If you can't turn it off, at least get me a drink while I'm waiting. Scotch and water."

"Yes, Man Forrester."

The view-wall was showing real bears now, large and ferocious grizzlies, while the woman chanted: "And Goldilocks goes to the bear lair — roaring, biting, slashing bears! But they are not home.

"They are not home and she eats their food. She sits where

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they sit, lies where they lie, and sleeps.

"She sleeps, and the bears come home!"

Forrester's drink appeared; he tasted it and glowered, for it was not Scotch. As best as he could tell from the flavor, it was a sort of salty applejack.

"The bears come home! The bears come home and their muzzles foam; the bears come back ready to attack, the bears come in with their jaws agrin!

"Red eyes glowing! (She sleeps, unknowing.)

"Claws that rend (is this the end?), paws that break (she starts to wake), teeth that bite —

"And Goldilocks opens her eyes, screams loudly, leaps to her feet and takes flight."

The woman on the view-wall paused, staring sorrowfully straight into Forrester's eyes. Her oratorial stance relaxed; her eyes seemed to lose their dramatic glow, and she said conversationally:

"Now, you see? What a terrible thing to happen to a little girl, and all because she rejected her parents. She ran and ran and ran and ran, a long, long time, and then she got back to her father/mother and promised never to reject them again, and made a good adjustment. Now please prepare to answer questions on the theme: "Is it wise to take chances on going to places your father/mother do not approve?" She smiled, bowed and vanished.

The joymaker said, "Man Forrester, thank you for waiting. There are certain nexial recursions not operative at the present time. Shall I attempt to display the Taiko tape again?"

"Oh, that explains it! No, thanks. Just tell me one thing," said Forrester. "Tell me how I can get myself nicely, but not painfully, killed. Because I feel left out of things. I want to be in the freezer too."

"That is not possible, Man Forrester."

"Don't give me that! It's got to be possible — everybody else did it, right? And I can see why. Nobody for company, the machines breaking down —"

"We are not breaking down, Man Forrester."

"That's *your* opinion. Anyway, all I have to do is call a death-reversal car and cut my throat, right? Then I'm dead and it's up to you-all to freeze me."

"No, Man Forrester. You may not do this. If you are killed in any way you will be revived at once, even if only on external heart-lung apparatus."

"The devil you say! Why?"

"Because, Man Forrester, you are about to be arrested. The coppers are coming for you now."

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XIX

Two coppers boiled into the room and manhandled him out into the corridor to the fly-in, where a police cab was waiting for him. They thrust him into it and watched as it soared away with him. He shouted out to them vainly: "Wait! Come back! I didn't do anything!"

"That is to be determined, Man Forrester," said a voice from a speaker grille over his head. "Meanwhile, please come with us."

The "please" was totally sense-free, of course; Forrester had no choice. "But what did I *do?*" he begged.

"Your arrest has been ordered, Man Forrester," said the quiet, unemotional voice of the central computation facility. "Do you wish a precis of the charge against you?"

"You bet!" Forrester stared around fearfully. There was no one at the controls, but there didn't seem to be a need for anyone; the car was sliding rapidly through the air toward the lake front.

"Your arrest has been ordered, Man Forrester," repeated the computer voice. "Do you wish a precis of the charge against you?"

"Damn it, I just said I did!" They were over blue water and moving fast. Forrester hammered the fleshy part of his fist against a window experimentally, but naturally enough the glass did not break. It was just as well, of course; there was no place for him to go.

"Your arrest," said the computer voice calmly, "has been ordered, Man Forrester. Do you wish a precis of the charge against you?"

Forrester swore furiously and hopelessly. They were approaching a metal island in the lake and the arcraft was dropping toward it. "All I want," he said, "is to know what the devil's going on. Joymaker! Can you tell me what this is all about?" But the mace clipped to him only said:

"We are all the same, Man Forrester. Do you wish a precis of the charge against you?"

By the time the aircraft landed Forrester had regained control of himself. Obviously something was wrong with the central computation facilities, but equally obviously there was nothing much he could do about it now. When two more coppers, waiting on the hardstand for the police car to alight, seized his arms and pulled him out of the door, he did not resist. The coppers' grip was quite unbreakable and their strength far greater than his own.

He saw no human being and

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no other automata, while he was herded like livestock down through underground passages, under the lake waters, until finally he was pushed into a door that locked behind him.

He was in a cell. It held a bed, a chair and a table, nothing else. Or nothing that was visible; its wall were mined with the usual electronic maze, however, because a voice said at once: "Man Forrester, message."

"Drop sick," said Forrester. "No, I don't want a precis of the charge against me."

But the message which followed was not the repetitious drone of the faulty machines. It was Taiko's voice, and a wall of the cell sprang into light to show his face. "Hi, there, Chuck," he said. "You said you wanted to see me."

Forrester exhaled sharply. "Thank God," he said. "Look, Taiko, something's gone wrong with the machines and I'm in jail!"

Taik'o bland face creased in a smile. "Number one," he said, "there's nothing wrong with the machines — in fact, something's going right with them! And number two, of course you're in jail. Who do you think brought you here?"

"Here? You mean you're here too?" —

Taiko grinned and nodded. "Not more'n fifty meters away, pal. So now we come right down to it. Are you with the Ned Lud Society or are you against it? Because this is our chance. Everything's so stirred up for fear of a Sirian invasion that we can straighten things out the *right* way. Know what I mean by the right way?"

"Smash the machines?" Forrester guessed. "You mean, you and I —"

"Oh, not just you and I," said Taiko triumphantly. "We've got a lot of help we didn't have before. See?"

And he touched a control, and the field of view dropped back and widened.

Taiko did indeed have a lot of help. There were perhaps a dozen of them, or almost, Forrester saw dazedly. They were in the same room with Taiko. One or two of them were human or robot.

The others were neither.

The others looked out at Forrester through eyes that were a circlet of gleaming green dots. They were Sirians.

"You see, pal," said Taiko, "we've got something going for us. Our friends here may be funny looking, but they're *organic*. Working with them we can get rid of the machine problem once and for all, dig? So are you with us or against us?"

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Forrester tried to answer and could not; things were happening too fast for him again. There were too many factors to consider, and he didn't understand any of them. Destroy the machines? Well, yes; maybe Taiko was right. But turn over the world to the Sirians?

Taiko said impatiently, "Doesn't matter, of course. If you're with us, good. If you're not — there's nothing you can do about it! But come on up here and we'll talk it over, hear?"

And there was a faint click, and the door of Forrester's cell sprang open, and a line of pale glowing green arrowheads pointed the way for him to walk.

Forrester marched like a man in a dream. He kept wishing Adne were there for him to talk to (but she was deep in the liquid-helium sleep of death), or that someone, anyone, some person with knowledge and kindness would tell him what to do. I wish I'd tried to find Dorothy, he said to himself. Or Wilton. I wish —

Wishes didn't help. He was hundreds of meters under the surface of the lake in a world that was dissolving around him. When he reached the end of his walk and found Taiko, looking fretful, exhausted and triumphant, waiting for him, it was as though the dream had turned into a nightmare and he was its helpless captive. "Yes or no," cried Taiko. "You want to help?"

"I don't know," Forrester said humbly. "Will you explain it to me?"

One of the Sirians moved restlessly, but did not speak. Its circlet of green eyes winked like gems, dimmed only faintly by the sheen of the plastic envelope that kept it from the attack of Earth's atmosphere.

"Sweat, man," groaned Taiko. "I don't have time for this! You know what we're doing? We've recruited half of central computation already. It's tricky work, but we're doing it. Another week and we'll have the whole damned complex of machine thinking destroyed — then mankind can take care of itself!"

"With these?" asked Forrester. "And what about their friends out in space?"

The Sirians looked on impassively. Taiko frowned. "Don't fret yourself about them," he said. "They're just technical advisors. I'm the one that's running this show, and don't forget it; when we finish busting up the machines they're going home."

Forrester sat down, trying to understand, and not succeeding very well. He heard Taiko's harsh, staccato voice go on and on — the Sirians had bargained with him and come to a treaty;

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once Earth's machine computation facilities were destroyed they would go back to their own distant planet and stay there. Their only interest in Earth was as a threat. Without machines it would be no threat . . .

"I don't trust them," muttered Forrester, more to himself than to Taiko. But he could not help but be impressed with Taiko's prospects.

When Forrester, all unwitting, loosed the escaping Sirian into space, he won Taiko's hardest battle for him. The Earth responded predictably by rushing into the familiar safety of frozen death, waiting for the danger to pass — or anesthetized against the shock and trouble that would come if it did not. So many were gone that the few remaining living humans who possessed any organization or purpose were the medical personnel of the freezers themselves.

And Taiko.

Taiko saw his chance. Alone he could not isolate the machine-intelligence circuits that he detested. But with help he could, for everyone who might stop him was deep in frozen sleep. Where to find help??

Why, the other Sirians, of course. They had the technical skill, they had the motivation — and they had not followed the great bulk of the world's population into cryogenic death.

After all, why should they? If the Sirians did invade, they at least had nothing to fear.

"So all we have to do," cried Taiko, "is break up the computers. Then my friends here go home, and we start waking up the human race again — a little at a time. The ones who are sympathetic, the ones who want man to be free again. The others —"

"Well, pal, what do you think? They like being where they are. Maybe we'll just leave them." He laughed suddenly. "Be a good joke on them, at that. They wanted to die, we'll let them!"

Forrester was suddenly jumpy. "Taiko," he said, "I have to think. Maybe you're right. But I've just now come to the conclusion that I don't know enough about this world to know whether I'm for it or against it."

Taiko waved a hand largely. "Take your time. The jail's yours. Just remember, there's nothing you can do anyway." And he went back to his Sirians, and their huddling over the remote controls of the central computation facility.

Forrester went out into the bright, empty corridors of Shoggo's underwater jail and faced his decisions. Item, clearly there was something wrong with a

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world in which people elected to die at the first serious challenge. But one the other hand — item — who was Taiko to make the world's decisions for it?

He saw a bright light ahead and walked toward it, and it was sunlight. Sunlight shining down a shaft, and a white death-reversal car humming quietly to itself as it waited.

Waited for what?

There was an attendant, but it was not human. At Forrester's hail it said, "Man Forrester, your arrest has been ordered. Do you wish a precis of the charge against you?"

"You're a broken record, machine," he sighed, and sat down. Somewhere in the near distance there was a whir and gasp of some kind of machine working, but he could not see its source, and lacked the energy to look for it.

The trouble with trying to make a decision, he saw, was that he really didn't have a decision to make. There was no way out of this place without Taiko's consent, and Taiko's consent would be given only to Taiko's friends.

"I might as well join 'em," he said aloud.

But the curious thing was, he didn't want to. As soon as it became clear to him that he had only one choice to make, that choice became abhorrent.

"Hello, Mr. Forrester," said a voice from somewhere out of sight.

The voice came from a small hospital-type room, where a man lay on a bed. He was heavily bandaged, and beside him was a whirring machine that seemed coupled to his body. "I thought I heard you talking to the DR machine," he said. "Remember me? I'm Sam Tshumu."

Forrester came closer, frowning. "I — I don't think so." But something was nagging at his mind. "Oh," he said, remembering. "You tried to get in touch with me. But I don't think we've ever met."

"You sure, Mr. Forrester?" And then Forrester leaned over him and saw a dark brown face, almost hidden by the bandages, with only bright black eyes looking out at him.

"My God," he said. "Yes! You were the one who kept those hoods from killing me! What are you doing here?"

Tshumu might have smiled; it was almost impossible to tell, with the bandages, but there was a movement at the corners of his eyes. "That's what I'm doing here, Mr. Forrester. I interfered when I shouldn't have, so I'm under arrest. I'm the only one still here, you see, because our friend Taiko has special plans

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for me. I'm a Utopian, and we've had our disagreements in the past."

"What do you mean, special plans?"

The eyes were filled with pain. "I'm dead, Mr. Forrester. They brought me back on a temporary basis to face trial, but I'm not self-viable; without the heart-lung equipment I'd be really dead. Only that's not good enough for Taiko. He wants me to be dead permanently."

"Wait a minute," said Forrester. "You got killed protecting me, right? Then you were frozen. But they've propped you up with this machine so you can be put on trial, because what you did was against the law?"

"That's right, Mr. Forrester."

"And now Taiko wants to kill you? I mean, really *kill* you?"

"That's right. When he's finished here he will leave and flood the whole installation. Maybe somebody will find me sooner or later, but not soon enough to help."

Forrester rocked back. "Why, that —" He stopped. He simply did not know a word strong enough to apply. "And all because you don't agree with him about the Luddites?"

"Because he's crazy, Mr. Forrester," whispered Tshumu. The breathy sound of the heart-lung machine changed its rhythm. "I'm sorry," said Tshumu faitly, "but I'm about to pass out. You see, Mr. Forrester, it's all up to you — now —"

And that was all.

"Wait a minute!" cried Forrester. "Don't leave me now! Tell me what to do!"

But the eyes were closed, and the only sound was the whir and hiss of the machine.

"My God!" whispered Forrester. If only there were something he could do . . .

And suddenly he knew there was.

He did not wait to think about whether it was a good idea or not. He did not stop to contemplate whether it would work or not. He turned his back on the man in the bed and marched back to the DR car. "Machine," he cried. "I'm not allowed to die, right? If I were dead, you'd have me revived right away?"

"Man Forrester," said the tall, intellectual-looking robot that stood beside the car, "your arrest has been ordered. Would you like a precis of the charge against you?"

"What I would like is an insurance policy," said Forrester tightly. "But I guess I'll take a chance this one time without one. Let's hope it's only your speaking circuits that are all messed up!"

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And he reached into the DR car and fumbled in the nest of first-aid equipment. What he wanted was easy to find; it was a scalpel, four inches long and razor sharp.

"Machine, do your duty," he cried, and with a rapid motion slit his throat.

The pain was astonishing, but it lasted for only a moment. And then the world roared thinly at him, and slipped dizzyingly away.

XX

"I was dreaming," murmured Forrester into the warm, comfortable darkness, "of committing suicide. Funny! I want to live . . ."

"You'll live, Chuck," said a familiar voice. Forrester opened his eyes and gazed into the eyes of Hara.

He thrust himself up. "Taiko!" he cried. "The Sirians! I've got to tell you —"

"You already told us, Chuck," said Hara. "They're taken care of. The Sirians are under lock and key, and Taiko's under guard right now, telling a computer what he did so that they can undo it."

"Oh." As though the words were a magic spell unleashing pain, Forrester felt a sudden pang at his throat, reached up and touched it and found it covered with soft plastic film. He slumped back, looking at Hara's patient, weary face. There was something he had to get straight with this man, he knew. Something about Adne . . . and something he had to get straight with Adne, too, if he ever saw her again.

"The DR machines worked, then," he said, remembering.

"Brought you right here, with a priority order to patch you up and send you back. But as soon as you were patched you started talking, and they called me." Hara sat down and put his hands on his knees. "You're not too crazy about me, are you, Chuck? Adne said you resented the fact that I was the father of one of her kids."

"*One* of them?" Forrester cried. "My God, that woman's —"

He stopped himself. It took an effort. After a moment he said, "I only hope I did the right thing. But maybe Taiko was right; this world is rotten clear through."

"Oh, we all are, Chuck," said Hara easily. "Didn't you know that? Everybody is, always. The whole history of the progress of the human race is the record of people trying to be better than they are."

"I don't understand you," said Forrester. Then: "But there's a

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lot I don't understand. And I guess it's important for the machines to be going again, and the world warned, in case the Sirians attack."

"It's important if they attack, sure. And twice as important if they don't. Get some rest, Chuck," said Hara, getting up. "And think about something, if you will. *You can't go back.* Don't think the world made a wrong turning somewhere a century or a million years ago; there's no such thing as a wrong turning."

He stopped in the doorway. "We're going to start reviving people pretty soon," he mentioned. "Most of them were panicked, and they'll be all right once they're vital again. It ought to be Adne's turn in about a week."

And he was gone, leaving Forrester to consider the next week, the next year, the next century —

And, as it turned out, the next fifty millennia, in all of which he was alive, busy and well. Because he lived happily ever after, as did they all.

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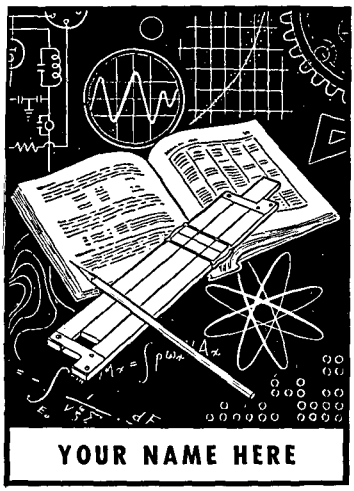

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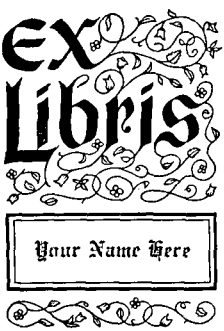

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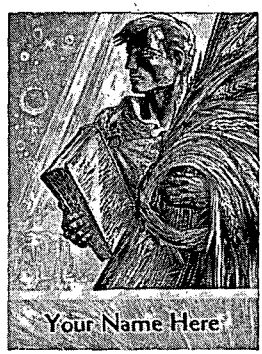

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